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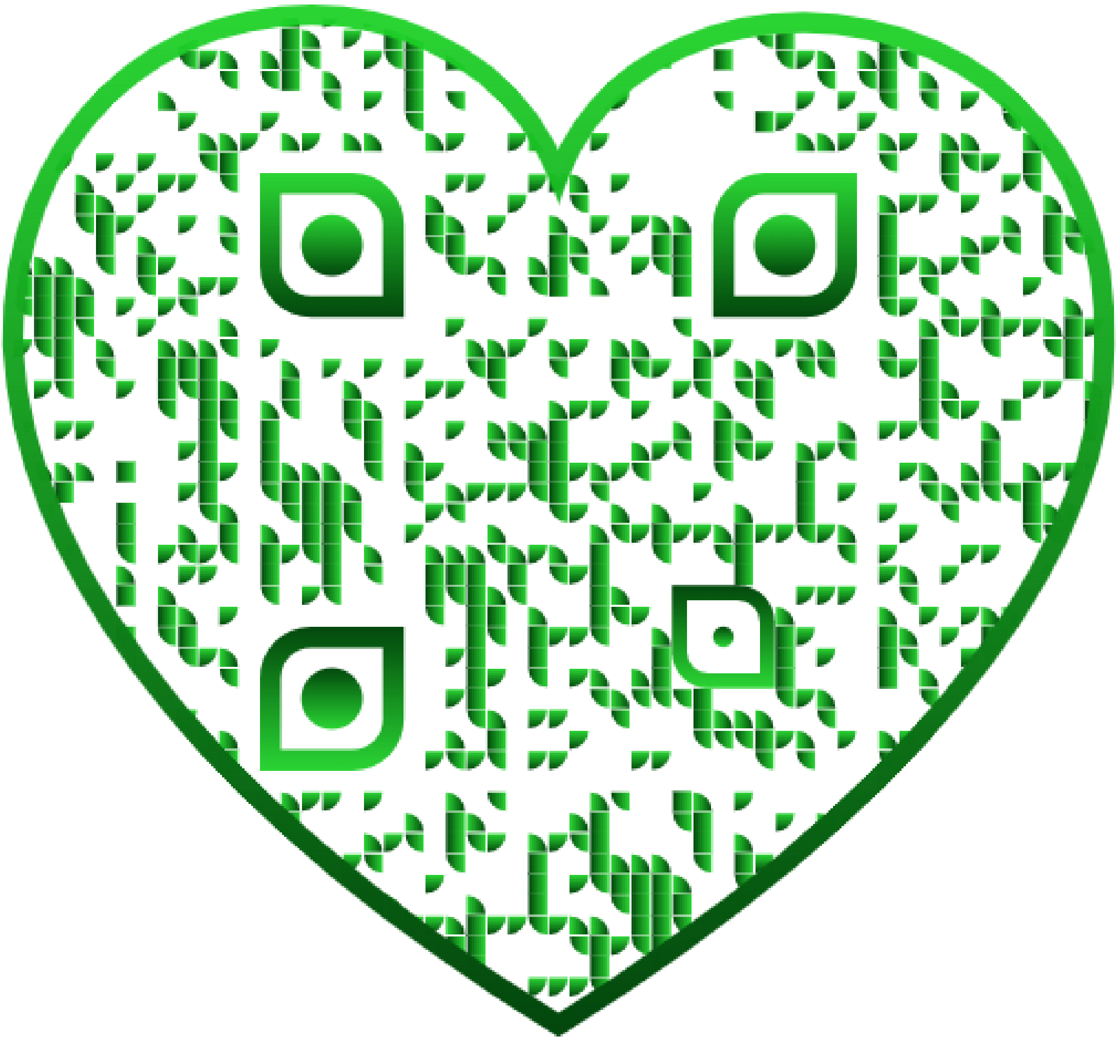

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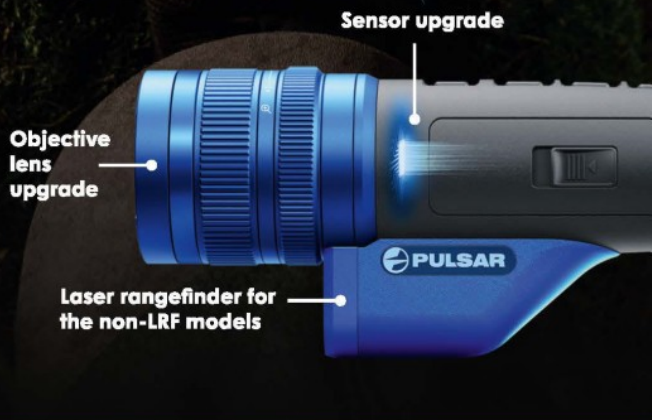

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Bird Watching

HAVE YOU SIGNED UP FOR 2024?

#My200BirdYear challenge

Bird Watching #My200 Bird Year

birdwatching.co.uk/my200

What's your favourite white (or mostly white) bird?

ALAN WILLIAMS/ALAMY

Amanda Tuke: "Spoonbill. I haven't yet seen one in London, having missed the brief appearance of one at Beddington last October."

PHILIP MUGRIDGE/ALAMY

David Chandler: "Big with a long, snaky neck, and mid-air guano-squirting Great White Egret."

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Ruth Miller: "It's got to be Snowy Owl. Self-found as we drove across the snow-covered high fjells in arctic Norway!"

NICK UPTON/ALAMY

Stephen Moss: "Great White Egrets are the symbol of hope on the Somerset Levels – elegant, snow-white and simply beautiful. What more could I want?!"

Revisit JA Baker's fascination with the Peregrine on p26

JEROME MURRAY-CC/ALAMY

Welcome

Welcome to another year of birding with *Bird Watching* magazine, although you may be reading this in late December, in which case Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year! We had significant snowfalls early this winter, which set us thinking about why so many birds, and not just those that will use snow for camouflage, are white or mostly white – on page 32 David Callahan has the answers. Winter also always sends me back to one of my favourite bird books, The Peregrine, because it's such a vivid evocation of the colder months, and on page 26 we take a look at the writer behind it, the subject of a fascinating exhibition.

But whether you've made a flying start, or are biding your time until the first stirrings of spring, I hope this year brings you all the birds you want to see – please let us know exactly what you do see, and enjoy every minute of looking.

Matt Merritt, editor

...and the *Bird Watching* team's answers

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Matt Merritt: "Snow Bunting. Whether on top of Ben Nevis, or hopping around the dam at Rutland Water, they're always a delight to see."

BLICKWINKEL/ALAMY

Mike Weedon: "The male Smew (largely white with black bits), sometimes called a 'White Nun'. Lovely."

Cover pic: Ptarmigan

MARKUS VARESVUO, NATURE PICTURE LIBRARY/ALAMY

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Bird Watching

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TOM BAILEY

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Matt Merritt, *Bird Watching* editor

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YOUR BIRDING MONTH

JANUARY

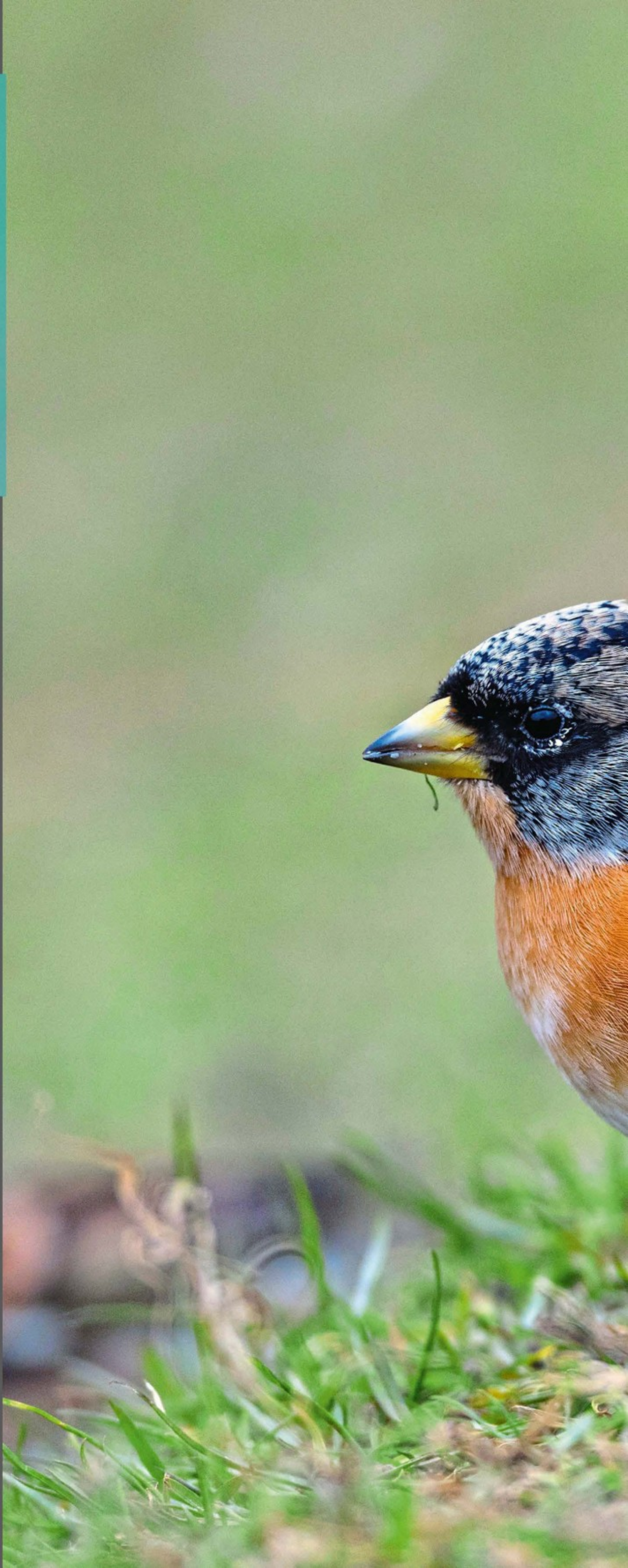
BIRD OF THE MONTH

BRAMBLING

The Brambling is a close relative of the Chaffinch, and is very similar in size and shape. But, though the Chaffinch is no slouch in the looks department (particularly the male, as the female is a bit like a female House Sparrow), the Brambling is a real beauty. Again, this is particularly true of the male, but females are pretty pleasing on the eye, too. The secret weapon is the colour orange, which is a feature of the breast and shoulders of Bramblings.

The bright orange of Bramblings is a colour we associate with birds like the American orioles rather than European birds, and contrasted with the pure white of the belly is particularly attractive. Set alongside the black head and bill of a male Brambling in breeding plumage, this orange elevates this finch towards an adjectival cliché which we try to steer clear of in *Bird Watching* magazine: stunning! But even in the depths of winter, male Bramblings (with an orange bill and a ghost of that black hood and mantle) are very handsome birds, indeed. White rumps are always a good point, too!

These are northern breeding birds from Fennoscandia and Russia, with only a couple of breeding pairs nesting in Scotland, each year. We see them mainly as winter visitors, in massively variable numbers, from a few tens of thousands to nearly two million individuals. It seems that this winter is a good one for these lovely finches in the country. Check areas with trees where finches like to gather (they readily mix with the likes of Chaffinches). Bramblings are particularly fond of beech mast if they can find it, but will eat berries and seeds from trees, as well as from the ground. Listen for the distinctive, nasal '*dweeb*' call, or the softer, conversational '*chep*' calls.



DID YOU KNOW?

In some parts of their wintering range (e.g. Slovenia) Bramblings can form enormous flocks of more than a million birds.

FIVE BIRDS TO FIND IN JANUARY

Happy New Year. A time of resolutions and restarts, and also a time when birdwatching is one of the best activities you can do (but when isn't it?). If you are a year lister (it is not compulsory), it is a time to bag a few great birds nice and early. How about these five crackers for the last days of Christmas, and beyond?

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RARITY RATINGS

🐾🐾🐾	Common, widely distributed
🐾🐾	Localised – always a treat
🐾	Very scarce or rare

JARED HOBBS, ALL CANADA PHOTOS/ALAMY

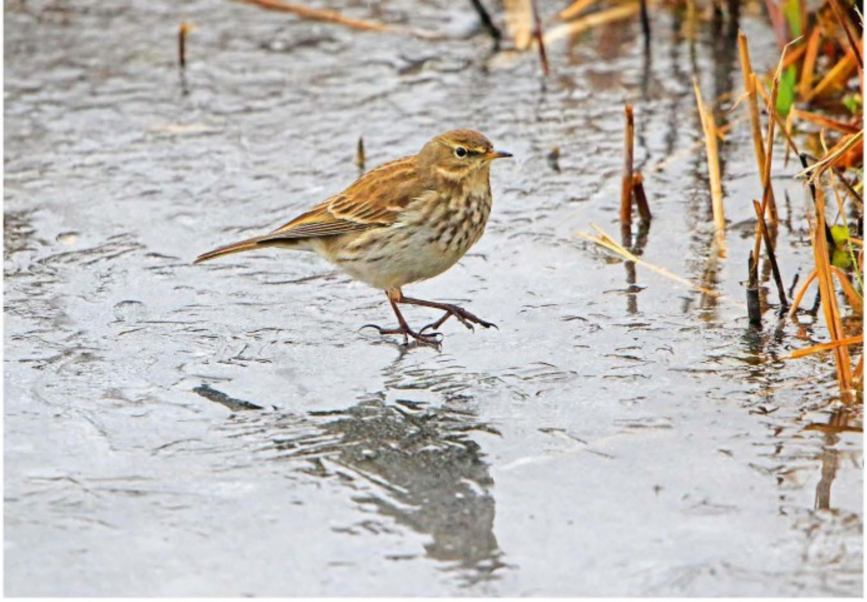
SHORT-EARED OWL 🐾🐾

Short-eared Owls are fairly scarce breeding birds of upland areas, moors and young plantations etc in the UK. Most of us encounter them as wintering birds, when British breeders move down to lower rough grasslands, saltmarshes and so on, and numbers are boosted by continental birds crossing the North Sea. Long-winged and buoyant in flight, these lovely owls have the added bonus (for we observers) of often hunting while the sun is still up, when they patrol like the owl equivalent of harriers, seeking voles. They are similar in flight to Long-eared Owls (which are habitually more nocturnal), but have paler bellies and, if seen well, obviously yellow eyes.

KIT DAY/ALAMY

PURPLE SANDPIPER 🐾🐾

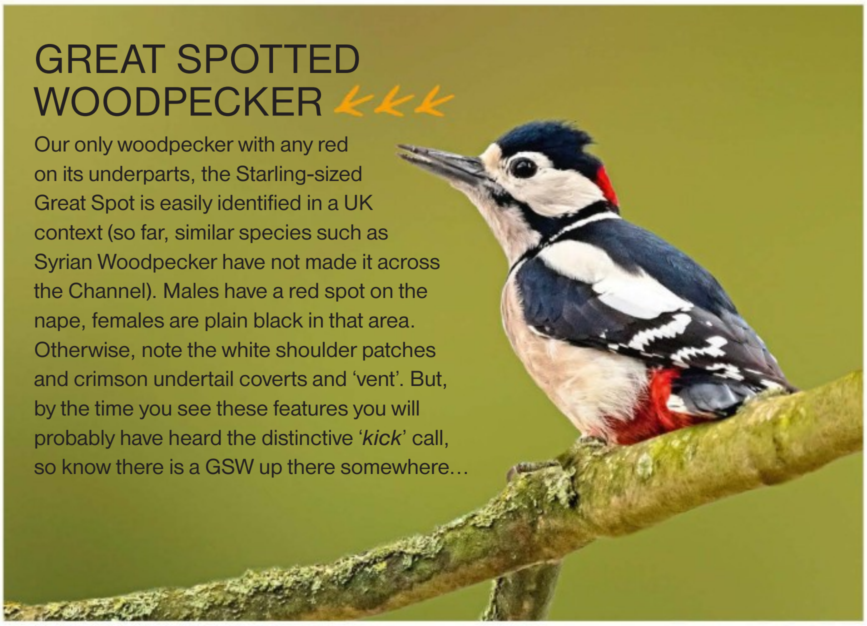
Even though about 13,000 Purple Sandpipers winter around our coasts, this charming, dumpy wader (like a big Dunlin in Redshank's clothing), is a hugely desirable find, especially on a New Year Big Day – a real birder's bird, you could say. Often in association with Turnstone, Purple Sandpipers favour rocky coasts, where they riskily feed among seaweed where the waves crash. And for those out for the 1 January Big Day, they are famously loyal to sites year on year, so find out where they were last winter and target that area.



PHILIP MUGRIDGE/ALAMY

WATER PIPIT

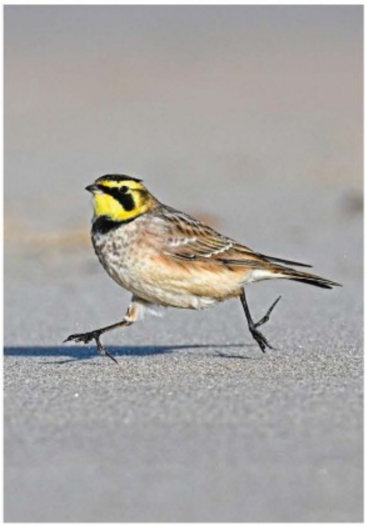
The scarce (c200 winterers) Water Pipit used to be ‘lumped’ with the closely related Rock Pipit, but tends to have very different habitat requirements than its darker, splodgy, coast-loving cousin. Water Pipits are anomalous in that they breed at altitude in mountainous areas, but winter around wet fields and similar habits, often at sea level. That is when we see them, of course, at this time of year looking like pale Rock Pipits with finely streaked breasts on a white background, and usually a well defined pale supercilium (‘eyebrow’) and a couple of white transverse wing-bars. These are painfully wary birds, often flying up with a ‘*feest*’ call and heading off hundreds of metres into the distance before disappearing into wet vegetation.



GEOFF SMITH/ALAMY

GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER

Our only woodpecker with any red on its underparts, the Starling-sized Great Spot is easily identified in a UK context (so far, similar species such as Syrian Woodpecker have not made it across the Channel). Males have a red spot on the nape, females are plain black in that area. Otherwise, note the white shoulder patches and crimson undertail coverts and ‘vent’. But, by the time you see these features you will probably have heard the distinctive ‘*kick*’ call, so know there is a GSW up there somewhere…



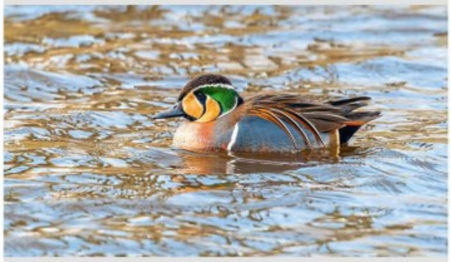
PAUL R. STERRY, NATURE PHOTOGRAPHERS LTD/ALAMY

SHORE LARK

Mainly an east coast speciality, the Shore Lark is another bird which many birdwatchers and year listers want to see as early in the year as possible. They are genuinely rather scarce birds, with an average of only about 75 visiting each winter (though numbers vary greatly). Like other larks, they are quite large for passerines, but unlike other larks, they have beautiful yellow and black markings on the face, and even tiny black ‘horns’ visible at times. As is hinted at strongly in the name, these are birds which enjoy a beach, be it sandy or shingly, shuffling along rather unobtrusively, looking for small morsels to pick up (seeds or invertebrates). Like Snow Buntings and Lapland Buntings, which often share the same habitat, they can be quite approachable (though not always!).

RARITY PREDICTOR

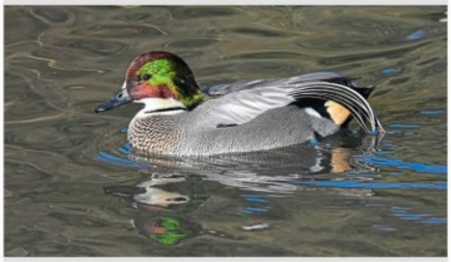
Every issue we poke a pin in a list of extreme rarities which may turn up at the relevant time of the year. Here are our January guesses. Good luck finding one of these crackers, or should that be quackers? Glory awaits any finder!



VINCENT LEGRAND, AGAMI PHOTO AGENCY/ALAMY

BAIKAL TEAL

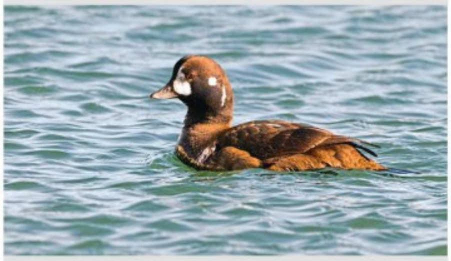
This impossibly pretty duck (or drake, at least) has only a dozen or so accepted UK records; presumably partly as a result of that prettiness meaning it is often kept in ‘collections’. There has been a bit of surge of records in recent years, though. Will the Greylake, Somerset, drake return again this winter?



ROBERT KENNETT/ALAMY

FALCATED DUCK

There have been a similar number of Falcated Ducks ever, too, including one in Lincs last January. Four have been seen in January, so it is a pretty good month to bump into one of these Asian beauties...

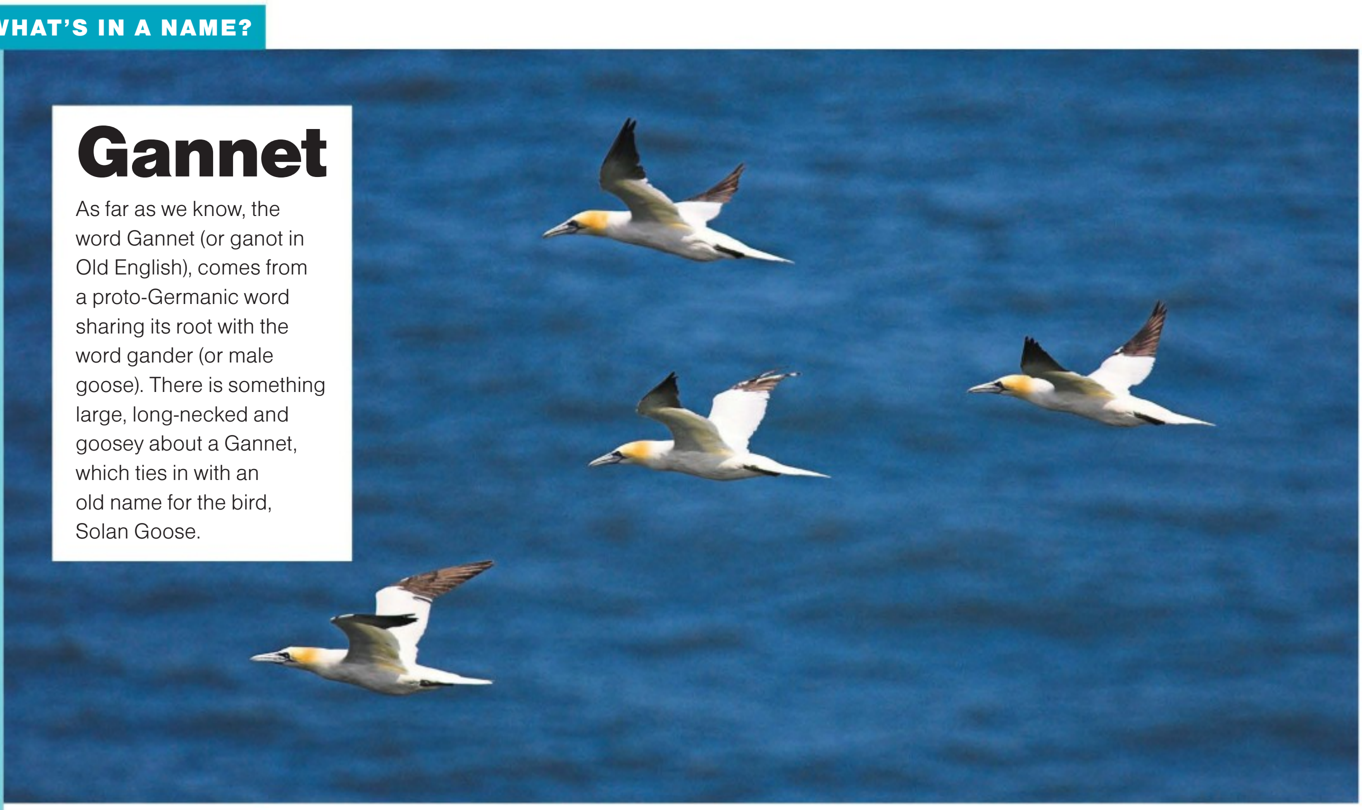


DAVID TIPLING PHOTO LIBRARY/ALAMY

HARLEQUIN DUCK

There have been about 20 accepted UK records of this northern breeding sea duck (and about 30 ‘not proven’), including half a dozen or so in the past decade. Nearly a third have been January birds, so, again, now is the time to search, especially if you are in Shetland or the Outer Hebrides.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

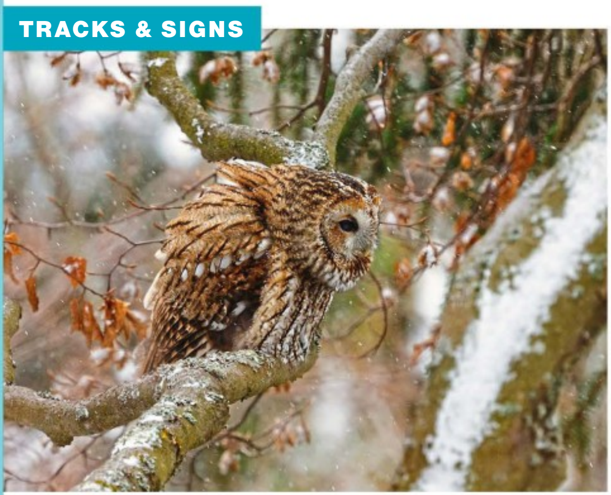


Gannet

As far as we know, the word Gannet (or ganot in Old English), comes from a proto-Germanic word sharing its root with the word gander (or male goose). There is something large, long-necked and goosey about a Gannet, which ties in with an old name for the bird, Solan Goose.

OLIVER SMART/ALAMY

TRACKS & SIGNS



PETER BINO/ALAMY

TAWNY OWL HOOTS

Many birds do not sing in the winter months. The Tawny Owl is one of the exceptions. So, listen for the classic quavering hoot (and the '*kevit*' call) even in January. Singing often peaks in the morning before it gets light at around 7am in early January. So, get in position in or near a suitable wood and listen.

DABBLING DUCKS
UK WINTERING NUMBERS OF OUR REGULAR DABBLING DUCKS

675,000	Mallard
450,000	Wigeon
210,000	Teal
31,000	Gadwall
20,000	Pintail
19,500	Shoveler

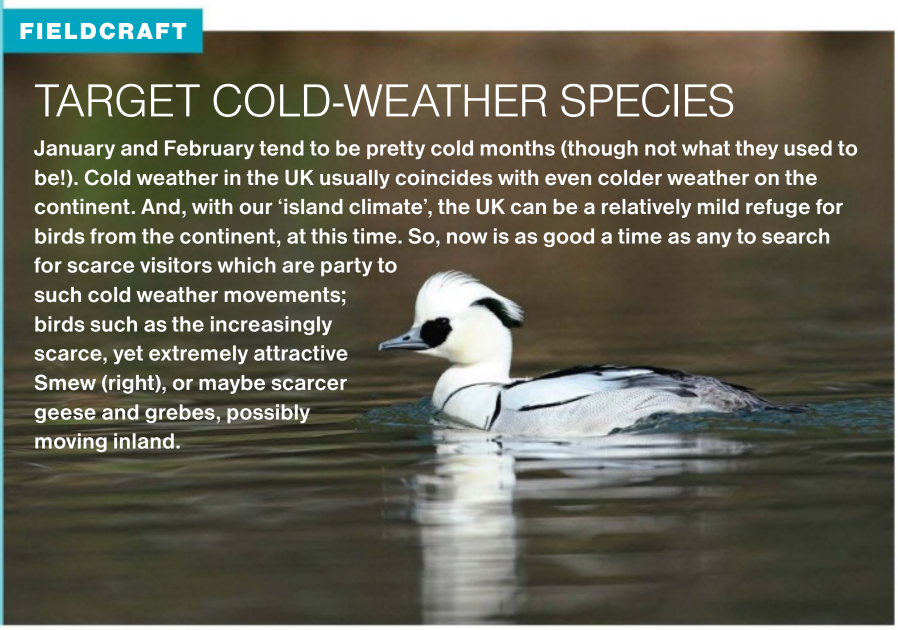
Drake Pintail

CHRIS GRADY/ALAMY

FIELDCRAFT

TARGET COLD-WEATHER SPECIES

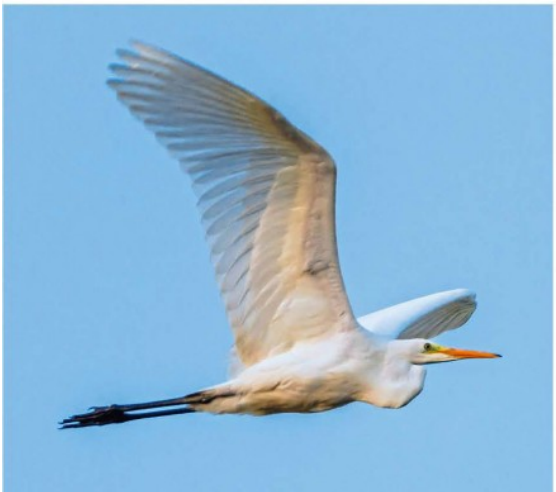
January and February tend to be pretty cold months (though not what they used to be!). Cold weather in the UK usually coincides with even colder weather on the continent. And, with our 'island climate', the UK can be a relatively mild refuge for birds from the continent, at this time. So, now is as good a time as any to search for scarce visitors which are party to such cold weather movements; birds such as the increasingly scarce, yet extremely attractive Smew (right), or maybe scarcer geese and grebes, possibly moving inland.



LISA GEOGHEGAN/ALAMY

Herons in flight

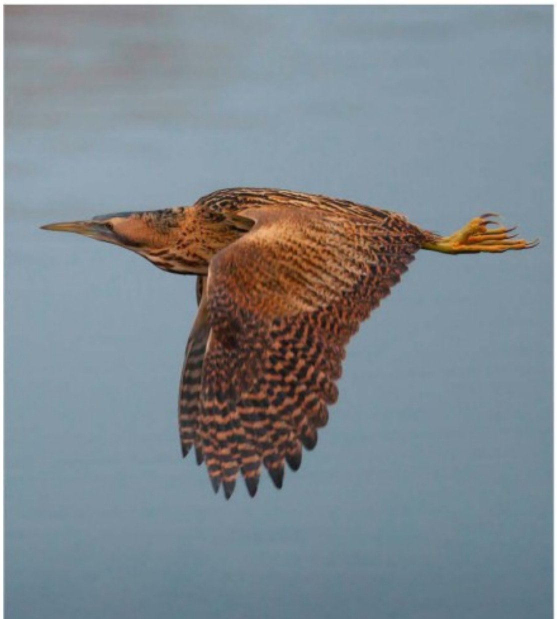
The Grey Heron, the three egrets and the Bittern all have distinctive flight profiles and colours in flight. Check out these five special birds.



Great White Egret

- Very large and slim
- Classic neck tucked in, very long legs outstretched flight
- Deep 'keel' of neck bulge distinctive
- Long, thin, yellow-orange bill
- All white

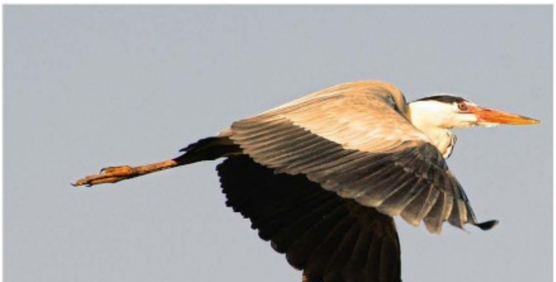
ELINA LITOVKINA/ALAMY



Bittern

- Medium, size and chunky
- Thick neck almost looks extended, large feet extend beyond tail
- Gives owl-like or Buzzard-like impression
- Medium bill, 'horn coloured'
- Cryptically marked gold and black barred plumage

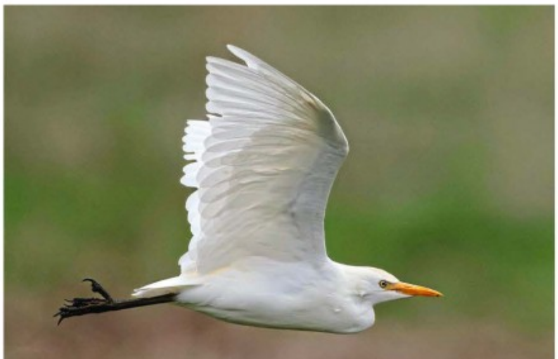
KEVIN SAWFORD/ALAMY



Grey Heron

- Very large and heavy
- Classic neck tucked in, legs outstretched flight
- Looks likes child's painting of an m-shaped 'sea gull'
- Long, thick, reddish orange bill
- Blue-grey upperparts

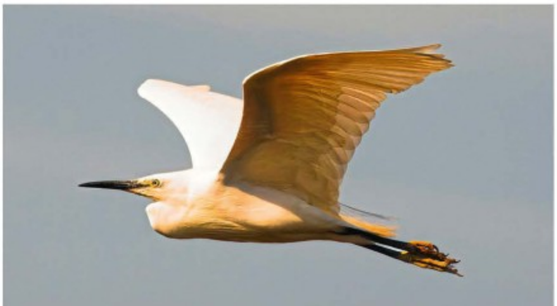
CHRIS HELLIER/ALAMY



Cattle Egret

- Small and 'chunky'
- Classic neck tucked in, shortish legs outstretched flight
- More compact than Great White, chunkier than Little
- Short, thickish orange bill
- All white, or with pale orange on crown (and elsewhere)

JEROME MURRAY - CC/ALAMY



Little Egret

- Small and slim
- Classic neck tucked in, black legs (yellow feet) outstretched flight
- More compact than Great White, but slimmer than Cattle
- Slim, pointed black bill
- All white

BILL COSTER/ALAMY

UK TIDES JANUARY

The times below are for high tide, when waders and wildfowl will be pushed closer to dry land...

Find the location closest to your destination and add or subtract the hours and minutes from the high tide time at London Bridge, below.

Date	Time	m	Time	m
1 We	02:30	**6.58**	14:48	**6.82**
2 Th	03:11	**6.63**	15:31	**6.92**
3 Fr	03:51	**6.66**	16:14	**6.96**
4 Sa	04:30	**6.66**	16:57	**6.90**
5 Su	05:09	**6.61**	17:43	**6.75**
6 Mo ◗	05:51	**6.53**	18:33	**6.54**
7 Tu	06:38	**6.43**	19:28	**6.33**
8 We	07:35	**6.30**	20:31	**6.17**
9 Th	08:48	**6.20**	21:36	**6.07**
10 Fr	10:01	**6.18**	22:45	**6.04**
11 Sa	11:11	**6.25**	23:54	**6.13**
12 Su	12:17	**6.42**		
13 Mo ○	00:55	**6.29**	13:16	**6.61**
14 Tu	01:48	**6.45**	14:09	**6.77**
15 We	02:34	**6.56**	14:56	**6.85**
16 Th	03:15	**6.61**	15:39	**6.84**
17 Fr	03:53	**6.60**	16:18	**6.73**
18 Sa	04:26	**6.54**	16:53	**6.55**
19 Su	04:56	**6.45**	17:24	**6.37**
20 Mo	05:25	**6.35**	17:54	**6.20**
21 Tu ◖	05:57	**6.20**	18:28	**6.01**
22 We	06:36	**5.98**	19:10	**5.79**
23 Th	07:26	**5.72**	20:06	**5.59**
24 Fr	08:39	**5.52**	21:20	**5.51**
25 Sa	10:01	**5.57**	22:35	**5.63**
26 Su	11:10	**5.82**	23:47	**5.93**
27 Mo	12:12	**6.17**		
28 Tu	00:45	**6.25**	13:05	**6.49**
29 We ●	01:34	**6.49**	13:53	**6.75**
30 Th	02:19	**6.67**	14:38	**6.96**
31 Fr	03:00	**6.83**	15:21	**7.13**

SOUTH WEST
Weston-Super-Mare (+5:05)
Barnstaple (+4:30)
Newquay (+3:32)
Falmouth (+3:30)
Plymouth (+4:05)
Torquay (+4:40)
Bournemouth (-5:09)*
Portland (+4:57)
St Peter Port (+4:53)
Swanage (-5:19)*
Portsmouth (-2:29)
Southampton (-2:53)

SOUTH EAST
Ryde (-2:29)
Brighton (-2:51)
Eastbourne (-2:48)
Dungeness (-3:05)
Dover (-2:53)
Margate (-1:52)
Herne Bay (-1:24)
Soutw-sea (-1:22)
Clacton-on-sea (-2:00)

EAST ANGLIA
Felixstowe Pier (-2:23)
Aldeburgh (-2:53)
Lowestoft (-4:23)
Cromer (+4:56)
Hunstanton (+4:44)

WALES
Colwyn Bay (-2:47)
Holyhead (-3:28)
Barmouth (-5:45)
Aberystwyth (-6:11)
Fishguard (+5:44)
Swansea (+4:42)
Milford Haven (+4:37)
Cardiff (+5:15)

NORTH WEST
Whitehaven (-2:30)
Douglas (-2:44)
Morecambe (-2:33)
Blackpool (-2:50)

NORTH EAST
Skegness (+4:29)
Grimsby (+4:13)
Bridlington (+2:58)
Whitby (+2:20)
Hartlepool (+1:59)
Blyth (+1:46)
Berwick (+0:54)

SCOTLAND
Leith (+0:58)
Dundee (+1:12)
Aberdeen (-0:18)
Fraserburgh (-1:28)
Lossiemouth (-2:00)
Wick (-2:29)
Lerwick (-2:50)
Stromness (-4:29)
Scrabster (-5:09)
Stornoway (+5:30)
Ullapool (+5:36)
Gairloch (+5:16)
Oban (+4:12)
Greenock (-1:19)
Ayr (-1:44)
Campbeltown (-1:12)
Girvan (-1:51)
Kirkcudbright Bay (-2:25)

IRELAND
Londonderry (-5:32)
Belfast (-2:47)
Donegal (+4:20)

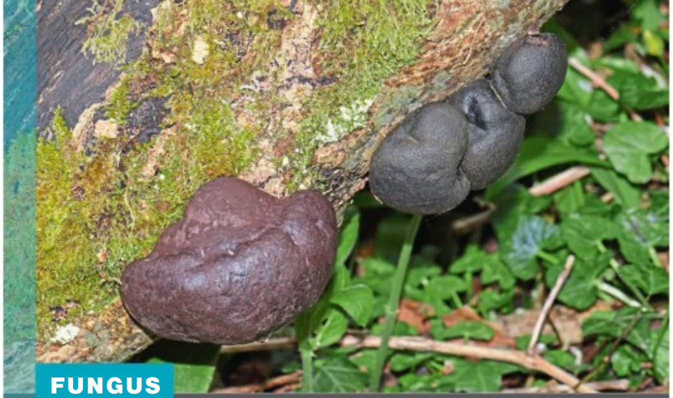
*Approximate times due to large variance between the month's neap and spring tides. All times are GMT.

Beyond Birdwatching

James Lowen shares some other wildlife highlights for the New Year

EARLY DOORS

We think of Lepidoptera (butterflies and moths) as being creatures of summer – lovers of warmth. But a fair number of moths fly during winter, too. One such is the appropriately named Early Moth. Although climate change means it is now starting to fly in December, this has historically been a moth that took to the air shortly after the calendar clicked forward into a new year. Its larvae love munching hawthorn and blackthorn, so this is very much a moth of the wider countryside, and one that ranges north to southern Scotland.



FUNGUS

Great British Bake-off

Stroll through a deciduous woodland at any time of year – but particularly during the leaf-free winter months – and you might notice what look like golfball-size lumps of coal, apparently stuck to trees. These are the fruiting bodies of a fungus known as King Alfred's Cakes. The name comes from an old tale about the 9th Century monarch, who reputedly took refuge in a peasant's home, but broke his promise to watch over some cakes baking on the hearth – and was berated when they turned to charcoal.

PLANT

Cigar-shaped flowers

Lesser Reedmace is a fairly regular feature of the margins of rivers, canals, lakes and ponds. Although reaching 2-3 metres in height, it is shorter than the commoner Greater Reedmace from which it differs through much narrower leaves and a clear separation between the male and female parts of the flower. It is sometimes referred to as Lesser Bulrush, although a bulrush is properly an entirely different species!

PLANT

The first buttercup

As its name suggests, Winter Aconite is the first member of the buttercup family to flower each year. By the end of this month, its yellow blooms atop a collar-like frill of sepals should appear in broadleaved woodlands.

CRUSTACEAN

Pondlife

Peer into a garden pond, particularly if the water is a little stagnant, and you might see a herd of woodlice-like creatures crawling around in the weed and mud. These are Two-spotted Water Hog-louse, also known as the Two-spotted Water Slater. These aquatic isopods are common and widespread in Britain.

MAMMAL

Marine roller

The Harbour Porpoise is the UK's most widespread and common cetacean, but getting a good view of it is quite a challenge. As this photo shows, the typical view is little more than a gentle arc of dark grey, cutting through the sheeny sea surface to reveal a small, triangular dorsal fin hallway along its back.

MOTH

Slumber pad

A surprising number of moth species survive winter by hibernating as adults. The most famous is the Herald, a dramatically shaped and attractively coloured insect which has a penchant for spending winter underground, often in caves (but also in tunnels, sheds and other dark places), where it may gather in impressively large congregations.

ALL PHOTOS: JAMES LOWEN

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Weedon's World

Please forgive Mike, as he once more lists his personal highlights from a fine year birding close to his home

MIKE WEEDON

Above
Male Brambling, Ferry Meadows CP, Peterborough, 18 October 2024

It is early December. This morning, I went out to witness something I had never previously seen in a quarter of century of birding around the Peterborough area. In a harvested sugar beet field were more than 2,000 Pink-footed Geese, with at least eight White-fronted Geese, a few hundred Whooper Swans, and a few Bewick's Swans. Picture the sight, imagine the sound. Usually, Pinkfeet are scarce visitors around here. This autumn into winter has been different, with many skeins reported, and now this mighty gathering, which will surely be around for a spell, if the food lasts.

It got me thinking once again how lucky I am to be living in such a bird-rich (yet inland) part of the country. And furthermore, it got me once more reviewing 2024, a truly exceptional year for the Peterborough Bird Club recording area (PBC area) and all the wonderful highlights during the year. So, please forgive me partially repeating last month's theme, as I launch into a 'list' of the best of my 'local 2024', and the highlights pile on top of each other.

A gang of five Waxwings were the stars of January, with one adult being the first I had ever seen with red 'wax tips' to the yellow tail (yes, tail!) feathers. By the end of February, high rainfall broke the banks of the River Welland, and flooded fields in the north of the PBC area were drawing down stupid numbers of waders. These included flocks of 600-plus Dunlins and 30-odd Turnstones (and, later, more than 175 Ringed Plovers). In March, I found a flock of 27 Knot. The wet fields yielded breeding waders: more than 50 pairs of Avocet raising more than 50 chicks from cute fluffballs (with tiny upturned bills), to scruffy teenagers.

The continuing spring floods allowed me to find passage Temminck's and Little Stints, plus the darkest red Curlew Sandpiper I have ever seen. In 2024, I saw 32 species of wader in the PBC area, including Purple Sandpiper and Stone-curlew, both of which were new for my all-time area list (plus three Black-winged Stilts and a Pectoral Sandpiper).

Watching those south Lincolnshire floods also delivered a couple of my best finds of the year: a passing pair of Little Terns and a second-summer Night Heron. And while on the subject of long-legged wading birds, 2024 produced crazy numbers of Spoonbills, including eight long-stayers in the same field when I found the Night Heron; and soon after, 150 Little Egrets were concentrated there. Glossy Ibises (plural) have been present throughout the year, and Great White Egrets have probably bred (spectacular black-billed turquoise-lored breeding condition birds were seen in unprecedented numbers). Roosts of the latter white giants brought more than 30 together in the autumn (a potential county record), while c.25 Cattle Egrets came in to roost.

> “ONE BREEDING TRIUMPH INCLUDED THE AREA'S FIRST EVER OSPREYS”

Sticking with wet-footed birds, I logged 22 species of duck during 2024, including Velvet Scoter and Ferruginous Duck as new list additions, as well as such scarcities as Long-tailed Duck and, from across the pond, Ring-necked Duck, American Wigeon and Green-winged Teal. In mid-June, I found a colour-ringed Mandarin at Deeping Lakes LWT which had been ringed in Dorset in January; one of the longest recorded movements of a Mandarin: 250km!

Breeding triumphs included the PBC area's first ever pair of Ospreys, which successfully fledged two youngsters. Goosanders and Stonechats are flourishing in their young-raising activities, and Cranes and Ravens continue to do well. Short-eared Owls lingered so long into the summer that questions were raised whether they may soon breed, too.

In August, I found a Spotted Crake, my first 'visual find' of the species. In the spring, I bumped into a couple of scarce and extremely beautiful rufous-morph female Cuckoos. On 9 June, I arrived at March Farmers (eastern Nene Washes) to witness many thousands (possibly tens of thousands) of Swifts feeding as far as the eye could see in all directions. Those Swift numbers were only rivalled much later in the year with the largest Starling murmuration I've seen locally, a sky-blackening, shape-shifting flock, perhaps more than 100,000 birds strong, at Eldernell. These last months of the year have brought influx treats of Yellow-browed Warblers, and Hawfinches, with accompanying good numbers of Bramblings which have allowed me to take some of my best ever photos of the species. And, in early spring, I was able to photograph a Merlin super close.

Last weekend, also at Eldernell (Nene Washes), I was delighted to find a glorious male Hen Harrier, bird number 196 for my PBC area year list. While there, I also counted a minimum of 30 Marsh Harriers, a record count for Cambs!

I hope this selection of my year's highlights have hinted at the sort of stuff that can be experienced if you get out there. Year-listing and the #My200YearList challenge help me to keep motivated, keep birding. Worth a try in 2025?

Mike Weedon is a lover of all wildlife, a local bird 'year lister', and a keen photographer, around his home city of Peterborough, where he lives with his wife, Jo, their children, Jasmine and Eddie having flown the nest. You can see his photos at: **weedworld.blogspot.com**

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Tophill Low
30 Mar
South and East
Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory, Kent
9 Feb
South and West
Blashford Lakes, Ringwood, Hampshire
28 Jan / 25 Feb / 25 Mar
Dawlish Warren, Devon
12 Jan / 2 Mar
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MAKE YOUR BIRDING COUNT

Having a lark out on the heath

Take part in the BTO's latest survey to help species that use a unique habitat

JON CARTER

Wood Lark is one of the key heathland species in question

AGAMI PHOTO AGENCY/ALAMY

Heathlands, and associated habitats, are incredibly special places. Often characterised by low-growing plants such as heather and Bilberry, punctuated with scattered trees, and accompanied by big open skies, these evocative landscapes provide a home for many important, highly specialised species.

Three key birds which breed in such locales are true birders' favourites: Wood Lark, Dartford Warbler and Nightjar. It has been two decades since these species' populations were assessed in detail, and 2025 sees the welcome launch of the Heathland Birds Survey, a project run by the BTO, in partnership with the RSPB, with funding support from Natural England.

We urgently need updated population estimates to see how breeding numbers and ranges for each of these species have changed throughout the UK and Channel Islands in the intervening years. We also want to know just how these birds are faring on the network of protected heathland sites that support the majority of their populations.

While we know much about the current distribution of these remarkable birds, it is hoped that the survey will allow us to get a better idea of the density of the populations as well as discover areas where they have recently colonised, or indeed, disappeared from.

Of course, most birders will be aware that the three key species are not wholly confined to heathland habitats, and the survey will also include other areas such as clear-felled and recently planted forests, cropped/mixed farmland, upland moorland, and coastal gorse scrub.

Along with Woodlark, Dartford Warbler and Nightjar, the survey also seeks to gather data on a dozen other bird species which often frequent the same habitats. Among these are Hobby, Cuckoo, Tree Pipit, Curlew and Snipe.

To find out more and to register to take part in the Heathland Birds Survey, please visit: **www.bto.org/heathland-birds-survey**

DID YOU KNOW?

More than 3,000 young people across the UK have received optics and field guides through the BTO's Equipment Donation Scheme, since it started in January 2021.

Grey Herons can lay eggs in February

JUANMA HERNANDEZ/ALAMY

Survey continues to shed light on heronries

As many birdwatchers know, Grey Herons are among the earliest birds to start nesting, often gathering at colonies, tending to nests, and even occasionally laying eggs as early as February. With a UK population currently showing signs of a slow decline, it is important that we continue to monitor heronries in order to chart the changes in these familiar birds' fortunes.

In the early 2000s, the number of nests was estimated to be in the region of 13,000 but following severe winters in 2008/09 and 2010/11 we saw a notable drop in numbers. BTO scientists have since noticed a slower than expected recovery, and the current population stands at fewer than 10,000 pairs.

When the BTO Heronries Census started back in 1928 it focused solely on Grey Heron. Now, following the colonisation of several species, the survey also includes Little Egret, Great White Egret, Cattle Egret, Spoonbill and Cormorant.

It will be interesting to see which other continental species, such as Glossy Ibis, which nested successfully for the first time in the UK in 2022, will join these pioneering species as regular breeders in the coming years.

Local patch birders may even be aware of new, or small, nesting colonies that haven't yet been recorded.

Find out more about how you can help the BTO Heronries Census at **www.bto.org/heronries**

Grumpy Old Birder

Where there's muck… there's wildlife, too, writes Bo Beolens

I saw my first Lion in the wild with its legs sprawled either side of a low bough, lolling in the rising sun amid the long grass of a national park. Behind the tree, in close view were the skyscrapers and shanties of Nairobi.

My first US Great White Egret walked by six feet away to pick at a half-eaten hamburger in a litter bin at my hotel in Orlando, Florida. The next day, I saw my first Muskrat at Orlando's home of effluent, alongside Yellow-rumped Warbler in the surrounding trees, and Common Yellowthroat flitting among the reeds.

My first Pitta was pecking between grass and litter on a road verge on the edge of a village in India. My first White Stork was finding sustenance among the discarded food waste on a Portuguese dump.

I once twitched a Spotted Crake in a muddy puddle, under a motorway bridge in the Medway towns, where it was half hidden by detritus including a dumped shopping trolley.

I have lost count of the lifers I've had at the sewage ponds of the world… African Swamp Hen in Cape Town's poo ponds, Painted Snipe in Goa, Wilson's Snipe in Broome, Western Australia... the list goes on.

Last night, I stepped from my car, in a car park in the centre of the most visited city in the UK, walking five steps to a footpath. As I looked across the fast, shallow river, a continual stream of hundreds of students walked past behind me, chattering at 90 decibels in a variety of languages. It was 6pm on a summer evening. There, on the far side, among overhanging vegetation, was a mass of sticks, stretching feet along the bank. After a few minutes, the homeowner swam into view. My life-tick European Beaver.

Obviously, as a leading exponent of isolation and melancholy away from the madding crowd, I'm not one to advocate birding anywhere near people, let alone crowds of horribly young, fit and convivial happies. But I will admit to elation upon seeing the beast ignoring everything humanity has, and just getting on with its life as a mostly crepuscular city slicker.

However, as you can see, many of my memorable wildlife moments have been in places normally only inhabited by Wombles. Birds and beasts make use of much of what us 'every day folks leave behind'. Sadly, that is not the norm; much of what we produce, enjoy and dump does horrible harm to innocent nature.

Nevertheless, there is a lesson down among the dirt and discards of us over-abundant apes. Nature has spent eons overcoming adversity and triumphing in distress. Evolution is all about throwing random mutations out in order to ensure that there are always plants, animals and the rest to fit unoccupied niches, and the least favourable conditions. Bacteria survive boiling geysers and chemical hell. Sea has life on its deepest beds, and so forth.

It's no wonder that some species manage to thrive despite our despoliation. While we can, and do, rejoice in their stoic survival, we could also see another lesson in this fable. There are two eco-models where wildlife gets up close and personal with us. One is this scenario of last resort… if we take the best for ourselves there are only scraps for other taxa, and they have to hazard proximity. The alternative is where we become so unselfish and benevolent that nature has no reason to fear us. I've sat among the birds, like St Francis, in places where they eat from your hand because they have no experience of the harm we can do.

Bo Beolens runs **fatbirder.com** and other websites. He has written a number of books.

GET IN TOUCH

Have you got anything to add to Bo's comments? Email us at birdwatching@bauermedia.co.uk

Bo's beaver: a hairy treat

BLICKWINKEL/ALAMY

SET A TARGET OF SEEING 200 BIRDS IN ONE YEAR!

birdwatching.co.uk/my200

Fieldfare is an easy tick at this time of year

ANDREW DARRINGTON/ALAMY

Sign up to #My200BirdYear

In the first days of 2025 there are many ways to give your year-list an instant boost, setting you off on the right foot to seeing 200 species in this calendar year. Here are some of *BW*'s top tips for getting off to a flying start...

For newbies, the idea is simple – #My200BirdYear challenges you to see 200 species of bird in 2025. It's entirely up to you how you set the parameters, though. It might be on your local patch, in your county, in the UK, or worldwide. The important thing is that it gets you out there birding on a regular basis.

For those of you who have taken on the challenge before, you can consider tweaking your rules to make it a little harder or easier, depending on how you've done in the past. But whether you're new to it or an old hand, bear these tips in mind...

1 PLAN TO SUCCEED

Don't worry, there's plenty of room for spontaneity, but it pays to do a bit of homework, too. Check your old lists to see what you saw and when, and work out which species are pretty much guaranteed, without any effort (Fieldfare and Redwing, for example), then concentrate on harder to find birds.

2 GET A FLYING START

Even if you didn't do a New Year's Day dawn to dusk birding expedition, a 'big day' early in the year is always a good idea – you'll probably be surprised how big a chunk of the 200 you quickly see – winter wildfowl such as Wigeon, Teal and even Pintail, for example.

3 BE OPPORTUNISTIC

Look out for storm-blown local rarities and scarcities, and keep an eye out for those irruptive species we talked about in the last issue – Waxwing, Brambling, Crossbill and, this winter, Hawfinch. It's a good idea to see them now, if they're around – they may not be towards the end of the year.

Tick Pintail on a 'big day' in early January

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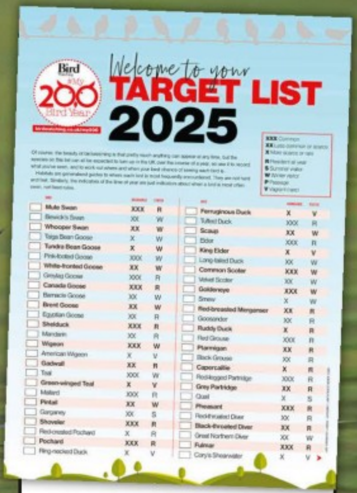

Bird Watching #My 200 Bird Year

Welcome to your
TARGET LIST
2025

XXX Common
XX Less common or scarce
X More scarce or rare

R Resident all year
S Summer visitor
W Winter visitor
P Passage
V Vagrant (rare)

☐	Mute Swan	XXX	R
☐	Bewick's Swan	XX	W
☐	Whooper Swan	XX	W
☐	Taiga Bean Goose	X	W
☐	Tundra Bean Goose	X	W
☐	Pink-footed Goose	XXX	W
☐	White-fronted Goose	XX	W
☐	Greylag Goose	XXX	R
☐	Canada Goose	XXX	R
☐	Barnacle Goose	XX	W
☐	Brent Goose	XX	W
☐	Egyptian Goose	XX	R
☐	Shelduck	XXX	R
☐	Mandarin	XX	R
☐	Wigeon	XXX	W
☐	American Wigeon	X	V
☐	Gadwall	XX	R
☐	Teal	XXX	W
☐	Green-winged Teal	X	V
☐	Mallard	XXX	R
☐	Pintail	XX	W
☐	Garganey	XX	S
☐	Shoveler	XXX	R
☐	Red-crested Pochard	X	R
☐	Pochard	XXX	R
☐	Ring-necked Duck	X	V

☐	Ferruginous Duck	X	V
☐	Tufted Duck	XXX	R
☐	Scaup	XX	W
☐	Eider	XXX	R
☐	King Eider	X	V
☐	Long-tailed Duck	XX	W
☐	Common Scoter	XXX	W
☐	Velvet Scoter	XX	W
☐	Goldeneye	XXX	W
☐	Smew	X	W
☐	Red-breasted Merganser	XX	R
☐	Goosander	XX	R
☐	Ruddy Duck	X	R
☐	Red Grouse	XXX	R
☐	Ptarmigan	XX	R
☐	Black Grouse	XX	R
☐	Capercaillie	X	R
☐	Red-legged Partridge	XXX	R
☐	Grey Partridge	XX	R
☐	Quail	X	S
☐	Pheasant	XXX	R
☐	Red-throated Diver	XX	R
☐	Black-throated Diver	XX	R
☐	Great Northern Diver	XX	W
☐	Fulmar	XXX	R
☐	Cory's Shearwater	X	V

Download and print off our **#My200BirdYear** ticklist to track your progress... **www.birdwatching.co.uk/my-200-sign-up**

Green-winged Teal is due for 'lumping'

SUSAN FELDBERG/ALAMY

4 VARY YOUR HABITATS

Try a bit of everything to start with, although it's a particularly good time of year to go birding in woodlands, where bare branches make birds easier to see, and both Great Spotted and (if you're lucky) Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers may already be drumming.

5 BEWARE OF SPLITS AND LUMPS

Some species that you may previously have counted, such as Green-winged Teal and Hooded Crow, are being 'lumped' back into Teal and Carrion Crow so don't waste time chasing them. Unless, of course, you count subspecies separately, which can be an interesting idea if you bird a patch that doesn't get a huge variety of full species.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker may be drumming, for the fortunate few

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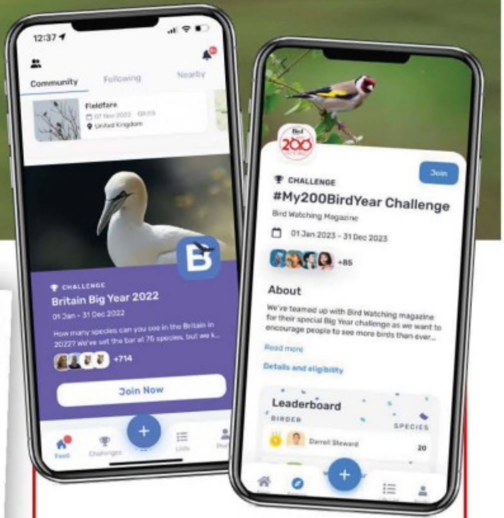

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Details and eligibility

Leaderboard
BIRDER SPECIES
Darrell Steward 20

You can track your progress in #My200BirdYear by joining us on the Birda app, as featured in our recent Gear Guide. Download the app, sign up for the #My200BirdYear challenge, and log your sightings as you make them. While you're at it, Birda's monthly and geographically-based challenges are a great way of motivating yourself towards the bigger target, too, and by interacting with other users you can develop your ID skills.

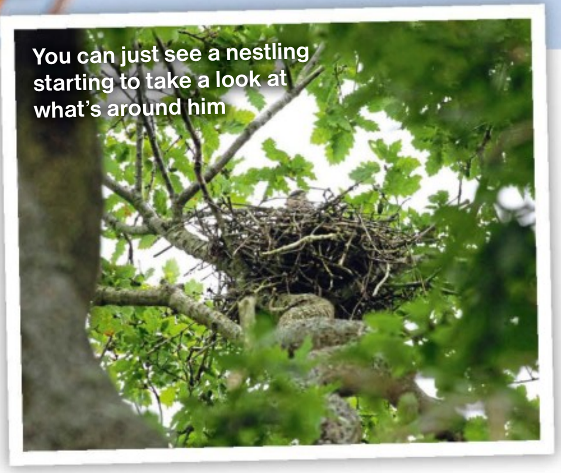
So, what are you waiting for? Sign up at **birdwatching.co.uk/my200** and join the thousands already rising to the challenge.

30 minute BIRDER

Noisy neighbours

'Kek-kek-kek-kek' heralds a Hobby

Last summer, 30-minute birder **Amanda Tuke** welcomed some new residents to her south London neighbourhood…



You can just see a nestling starting to take a look at what's around him

AMANDA TUKE

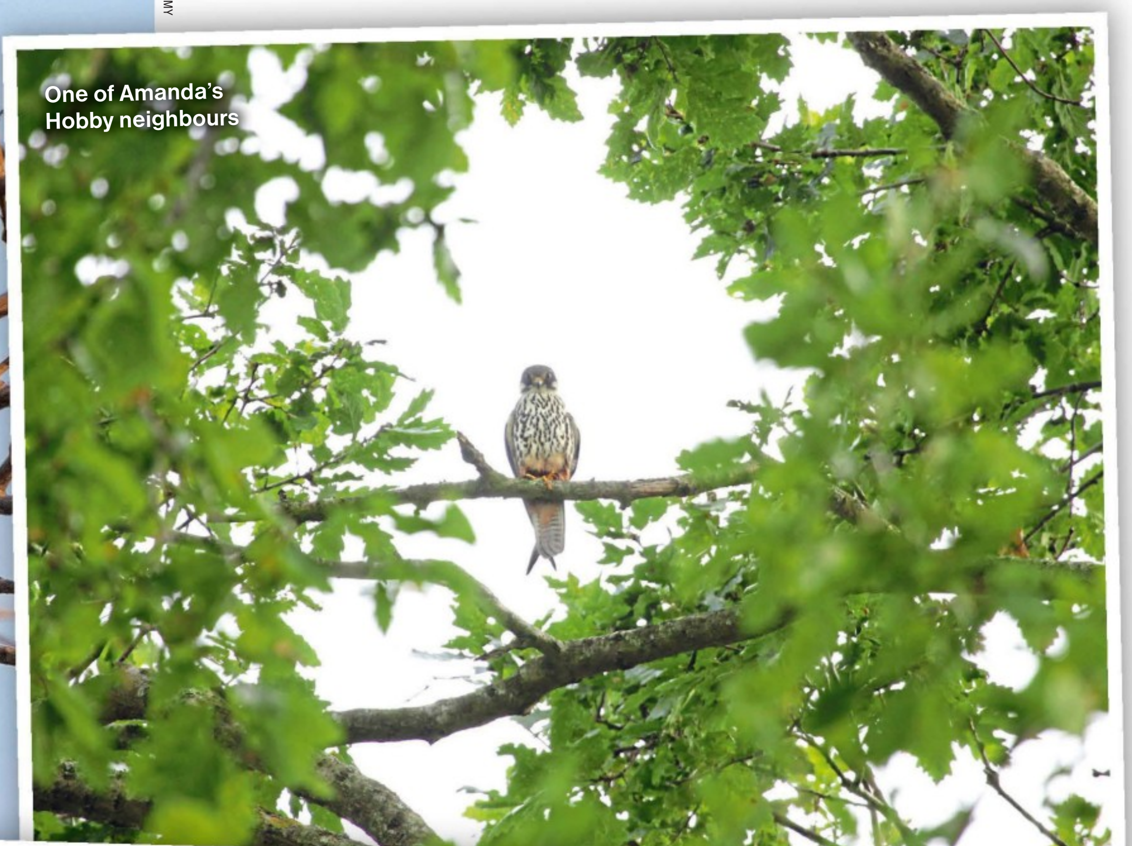
My 2024 birding year was exceptional, and not because, as the year ends, I have more birds on my year list than any previous year. But rather because of an extraordinary story which began back at the start of summer.

There I was, drinking coffee in our little back garden one June morning, and listening to the squabbling of Ring-necked Parakeets and the agitated caws of Carrion Crows, when a sharp descending '*kek-kek-kek-kek*' call cut through. Our mid-terrace house is built on the side of a hill. The sound was coming from the large English Oak tree growing 20 metres behind the house in a communal green space. It's a tree we know and love, providing plenty of bird interest, although anxiety-making when it's very windy.

And then it called again. A Hobby. How likely was it for a Hobby to be calling from a tree in a housing estate in inner London? Likelier, perhaps, than you might think. A few years ago a pair nested in the strip of woodland between our road and the playing fields which line the South Circular. The precise location of the nest site was kept secret, but, later that summer, I did see three mewing Hobbies circling over our garden. So they've got form, locally.

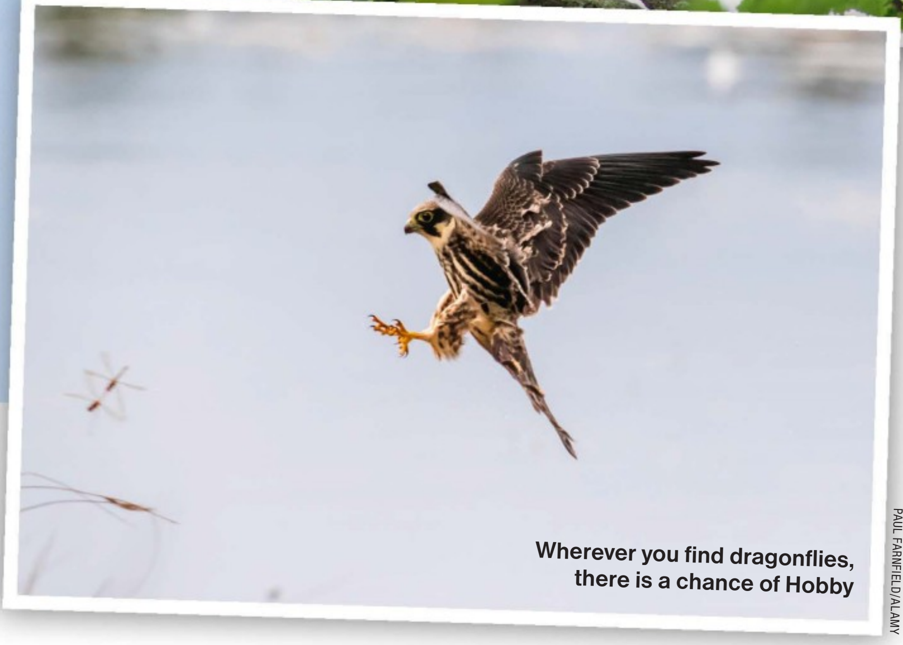
Fast forward, and each morning after that first coffee with a Hobby I heard those same '*kek-kek-kek-kek*' calls. Finally, I was rewarded

AGAMI PHOTO AGENCY/ALAMY



One of Amanda's Hobby neighbours

AMANDA TUKE



Wherever you find dragonflies, there is a chance of Hobby

PAUL FARNFIELD/ALAMY

with the sight of two birds flying from our oak across the roofs of our road's houses and into the wood. Had they moved into the old crows' nest high in the tree? We love living here, but it wasn't the most obvious choice for peaceful chick rearing. The communal garden is well used by families, and children's parties are regularly hosted under the tree.

A week later, as June became July, I watched the pair calling and displaying over the wood one evening. This was the ultimate window birding. And July carried on in that blissful vein, with my other half and I hearing calls from our new noisy neighbours and glimpsing the birds most mornings and evenings.

I still hadn't seen the birds actually using the old nest, so one evening I crossed the road and spent an hour or so looking back over our roof for a clearer view of it. A friend trudged up on his way back from work and hung out for a chat. One of the adults chose that moment to drop directly out of the nest and fly over us.

The day of the neighbourhood summer barbecue dawned… which of course was to take place under the Hobby nest tree… in which I guessed there might now be eggs or even

Family sagas

Bird Watching magazine reader Beth Richardson tells Amanda what changed her views of garden nest success

In spring 2023, our garden enjoyed a bounty of birds nesting in trees, hedges and hidey-holes. But the youngsters made easy pickings for predators. Magpies pillaged a Blackbirds' nest, Jays plucked freshly fledged House Sparrows, and crows flew over, beaks filled with fluffy Starlings.

So, this year, when a pair of Magpies chose to nest in our Apple tree, my heart sank. The Blue Tits' favourite box was already occupied close by. And Woodpigeons were industriously delivering twigs to the very same tree. I was disappointed, but there was a surprising calm. The Blue Tits relocated to an empty sparrow terrace. Our other regular nesters – Blackbirds, House Sparrows, Robins and Wrens – bred elsewhere. The Magpies' nest, however, attracted a lot of unwanted attention from crows. The fewer fledglings in the garden meant less predation and we got to witness the challenges and triumphs of a different avian family.

Most summer mornings and evenings brought a Hobby sighting overhead

NEIL CALBRADE/ALAMY

nestlings. Would the music and chat bother the birds? Should I have asked for the party to be sited somewhere different? Or was it better if people didn't know the birds were there? I needn't have worried. After some partying into the small hours, the birds noisily made their presence felt in the tree the following morning. And it turned out that my lurking around with binoculars hadn't gone unnoticed by our human neighbours...

One evening in mid-August, I was sitting under a Hornbeam with a reasonable view of the nest. Something flicked above the nest rim – a pair of downy wings flapping vigorously. Finally, the proof that we had at least one baby. As I waited for an adult to return, I idled away the time in true anorak style using Pythagoras' theorem to try and work out how far the nest was from our back door. About 35 metres or so. Half an hour later, an adult slunk in silently, stayed at the nest for around a minute, and left as quietly as it had arrived.

The following morning, there was a kerfuffle in the nest. It looked like housekeeping was underway, with a shower of dusty material ejected over the nest rim. An adult came off the nest somewhat clumsily and perched on the other side of the tree. She shook her wings and, after a few minutes, launched awkwardly into the air before circling. Why "she"? I hear you ask. Well, I've read that the females broadly stay on the nest to defend the young, with the exception of short trips away, while the males do most of the food providing. At a guess, the bird I saw that morning was the female needing a stretch after a long night of brooding.

That evening, I was back sitting tucked under the Hornbeam with my camera pointed upwards. While I was faffing around with light settings, I saw a pale, downy head appear over the rim of the nest, and then what I thought was a second smaller one. So, there were at least two nestlings.

On the final Saturday in August, I woke to the sound of torrential rain and no evidence of the birds all day. Then early the next morning something was clearly kicking off in the tree. The two Hobbies were calling frantically as they attempted to fend off a group of Magpies who were edging up to the nest. I had other places to be but I heard later from friend and neighbour Penny that a vigorous battle took place. Penny and I met at the viewing point that evening. There was no sign of nestlings, just a couple of downy feathers on the nest rim. I wondered gloomily if the nestlings had become weakened in the wet weather, and then the Magpies had finished them off.

On Bank Holiday Monday I watched as one of the adults mobbed a pair of Magpies over our house. There was no sign of the second adult, which was worrying. By mid-afternoon, I was back at the viewing point, and joined by neighbours with their two grandsons. The little boys looked up at the nest through toy binoculars. We all saw something moving on

Ring-necked Parakeets are routinely heard from Amanda's garden

DAVID CHAPMAN/ALAMY

Carrion Crow is a regular fixture of the suburban cacophony

ERNIE JANES/ALAMY

the nest and an ungainly but well-developed wing. I felt ridiculously happy, and realised just how invested I had become in what now appeared to be just one remaining nestling.

The lone adult continued to arrive each morning that week, as did the Magpies. Then, one evening at the end of August, I arrived to see the nestling vigorously flapping and apparently trying to fledge. Its wings looked odd, with several flight feathers sticking out at strange angles, and it seemed unable to climb onto the rim, as if it was caught on something. By the following morning, the young bird was dangling lifeless over the side. I was gutted. Penny and I had been in regular communication and I texted her to say our fledgling sadly hadn't made it.

I moped around the rest of that day, before pulling myself together to read up on the species to try and get things into perspective. The (Eurasian) Hobby seems to be broadly doing OK. They're green-listed in the UK, and are considered birds 'of least concern', internationally. There are thought to be about 2,000 breeding pairs in the UK each year and they're spreading northwards in the British Isles, with a range which has increased fourfold since the 1960s, when their population had been decimated by persecution.

So, the big picture for this small, elegant falcon appears to be better news than it is for some of our other raptors. And, even knowing how the story of our noisy neighbours' nest unfolded, it was a delight sharing our neighbourhood with this fabulous and often elusive species. It would be all too easy to rant about corvid predation while glossing over the likely grim fate of the second nestling, but I refuse to do that. Sometimes it's hard, but I honestly believe that it's the downs as well as the ups of birdwatching which make it such a rich and rewarding experience. Watching the Magpies working out their best strategy for taking on these formidable birds was fascinating, too. And that's what I've been saying to human neighbours who'd never heard of Hobbies, but followed their story avidly.

On the last day of August I sat on the grass with a coffee, watching the remaining adult circle for half an hour or so against an achingly blue sky. Seeming to expend the minimum amount of energy with the tiniest of flaps of its scythe-shaped wings, it flew near enough that I could see moustache and chest markings even without binoculars. I guessed that this might be the last time I'd see it. So it proved to be. BW

J. A. BAKER author of THE PEREGRINE
THE HILL OF SUMMER
UNCORRECTED ADVANCE PROOFS
THE HILL OF SUMMER
J. A. BAKER
COLLINS
POSSIBLE POETRY
1
3
THE FALCONS OF THE WORLD

Restless BRILLIANCE

Want to know what inspired a classic of nature writing? Head for Chelmsford, writes **Matt Merritt**

Most of us, I'd guess, have at least one or two books that have had a huge impact on our birdwatching lives, whether in inspiring us to take up the hobby in the first place, or in helping us master at least a few of its intricacies.

I can think of two in my own case. One was the Reader's Digest Field Guide to the Birds of Britain, which my parents bought when I was young. It wasn't just the beautiful illustrations, but the fact that the species' accounts provided not only practical ID help, but also dipped into folklore and history and culture.

But the other was a book I didn't discover until I was in my mid-20s, just as I was starting to get seriously back into birding again. J A Baker's The Peregrine, first published in 1967, has played a similar role in many birders' lives.

The book was an immediate success, winning a number of awards and being described as a masterpiece of nature writing, and in the years since its publication, its critical reputation has grown, if anything – a whole new generation of nature writers and naturalists have cited it as an inspiration and influence.

Essentially, it's written as a diary of a single winter – the exceptionally cold and snowy one of 1962-63 – in which Baker describes the birds that he saw on the estuaries and countryside around his Chelmsford home, with a particular emphasis on Peregrines.

> “A NEW GENERATION OF NATURE WRITERS AND NATURALISTS CITE IT AS AN INFLUENCE”

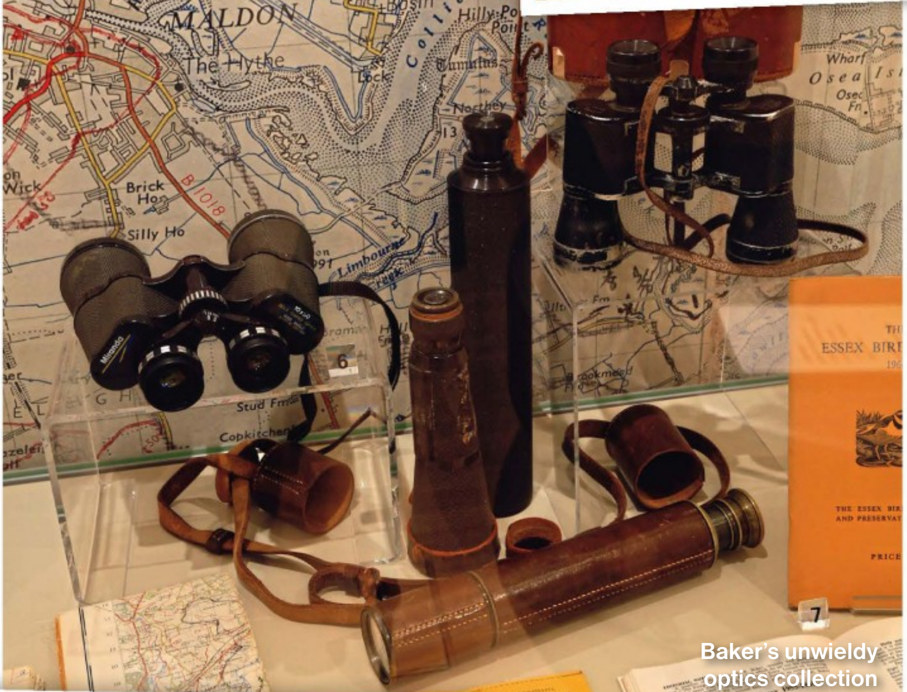
At the time, the raptors were at a low ebb in the UK, and indeed in most of the world, in part due to persecution and habitat loss, but more importantly due to the effect of pesticides in the food chain.

There's since been debate as to whether all the Peregrines Baker was seeing were actually Peregrines, and whether or not some were escaped falconers' birds, but the book remains an extraordinary account of one man's close observation of the iconic species, as well as of other birds and wildlife, and it's also an incredible evocation of winter.

Whenever I re-read it (every couple of years, at least), I'm struck by just how intense and concentrated it is, both in its style, and in the effect it has. This isn't a page-turner, to be read in a single sitting, or something that you can easily dip into. To me, it always feels like a fine

Some archive pieces are being displayed in public for the first time

BW editor Matt soaks it all up



Baker's unwieldy optics collection

single malt whisky, something to be savoured in small quantities after a cold day's birding.

Since March 2024, Chelmsford Museum has been staging an exhibition called Restless Brilliance: The Story of J A Baker and The Peregrine.

So successful has it been that its opening has been extended until 23 February, so you still have time to get along and see it and learn more about the enigmatic writer, and the creative process of writing the masterpiece. It includes the archive of his work held by the Albert Sloman Library at the University of Essex, the first time that this archive has been on public display.

John Alec Baker (1926–1987) was born, and lived almost his whole life, in Chelmsford, so it's perhaps overdue that his home town recognised his unique

Chelmsford City Museum
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Go visit

Restless Brilliance: The Story of JA Baker and The Peregrine

Chelmsford Museum

Dates: To 23 February 2025

Times: 10am to 4pm everyday

Admission: Free

www.chelmsford.gov.uk/museums/whats-on/temporary-exhibitions/restless-brilliance-the-story-of-ja-baker-and-the-peregrine/

PHOTOS: TOM BAILEY

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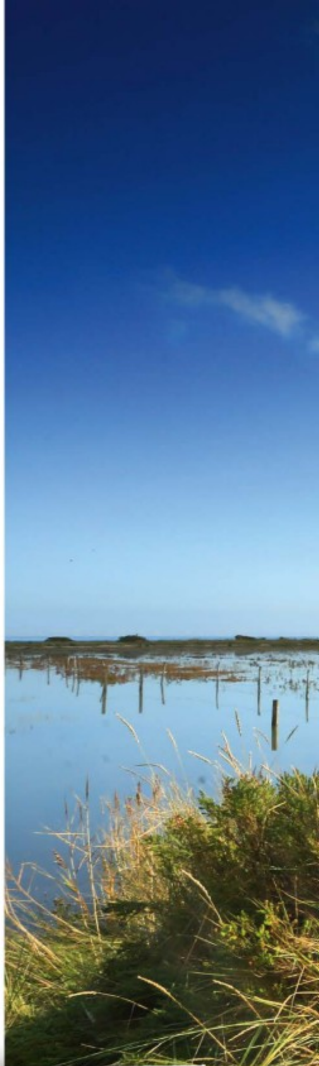
BRADWELL BIRD OBSERVATORY



Othona
Seawall

Following in Baker's footsteps at the Blackwater Estuary

Military ruins provide excellent seawatch spots

contribution to ornithology.

The title of the exhibition comes from Baker's own description of what led him to write the book: "For ten years I spent all my winters searching for that restless brilliance, for the sudden passion and violence that peregrines flush from the sky."

You can see the notebooks and diaries in which Baker painstakingly recorded his sightings, before condensing a decade of observations into the single winter described in the book.

Interestingly, too, there's earlier writing from Baker, including the poetry which he'd been writing since he was a young man.

What makes The Peregrine such a wonderful book, for me at least, is the way it blends real world description and observation with a large dose of poetic licence, so to see the two strands of Baker's writing in isolation, and only gradually coming together, is thrilling and inspiring.

But equally fascinating is seeing the binoculars that Baker used for many of his observations. It's difficult, in these days when optics are not only high quality but also compact and lightweight, to understand how on Earth he managed to see so much, and to describe it so superbly, using large, heavy bins that must have been quite a burden on long expeditions into the wintry countryside.

But perhaps that's the point. Many of us started our birding lives using similar binoculars, and maybe over time we've forgotten that using such relatively primitive optics forced you to take your time, and watch closely – really closely.

> " DRIVING AROUND THE ESTUARY'S FRINGES, WE GET A SENSE OF BAKER'S LANDSCAPE "

Similarly, Baker's work is of course an absolute vindication of keeping a notebook or journal of your birdwatching – in his day, record shots or better on a compact, lightweight and inexpensive camera wasn't an option.

Finally, the exhibition reminded me that Baker did all his birding on foot, or by bike. Looking at the huge map of the Blackwater Estuary and its environs makes you realise that, like many birders at the time, Baker had no option but to watch what was within easy reach of home. Again, that meant that he spent longer over each sighting, and while he was going out actively seeking what was then a fairly scarce species, he also had plenty of time while

SALTMARSH COAST TRAIL
ST PETER'S CHAPEL 0.5MI
Beware Adders

Bradwell is a bird-rich habitat that definitely deserves a visit

searching and waiting to see whatever else crossed his path. I've been known to do some fairly close-to-home twitching myself, so I can't claim that The Peregrine has totally shaped the birding I do, but Baker's approach remains an attractive one – motivate yourself to get out there by having a target species or two, but let the search for them take you to places and birds you might not otherwise have seen.

On the day on which I visited the exhibition, with *BW* photographer, and fellow JA Baker fan, Tom Bailey, our time was limited, and the gloriously clear, sunny autumn skies felt a bit at odds with the tone of the book, where mists and fogs and snow flurries only slowly give up their riches, and the low light of winter is a constant presence and obstacle to accurate observation.

But nevertheless, driving around the fringes of the Blackwater Estuary, we could get a sense of Baker's landscape, with its farmland and hedgerows and spinneys and green lanes slowly giving way to the wide flat expanses of the marshes, and then the grey-green blur of the mudflats and water. It's an unspectacular, typically British landscape in many respects, but it's also one in which you can imagine making your own discoveries every time you go out, because there's always something different just around the next corner.

We ended up at Bradwell, near the estuary's mouth, where the tide had pushed little knots of…Knots, and Redshanks, Oystercatchers and Curlews, close to the observatory, and Buzzards wheeled overhead, and little gaggles of Brent Geese moved along the shoreline in search of eelgrass.

Try as we might, we couldn't turn any of the Kestrels hunting over the flatland into Peregrines, but they're there, in winter at least, thanks to the spectacular comeback they've made in the UK. In Baker's time, they bred only on rocky western coasts and in remote mountain fastnesses, but now, they're a bird of city and town.

That's a good news story that Baker couldn't have expected, but would most certainly have applauded.

Next time you see that familiar anchor shape in the sky, skittering the pigeons on your patch (and I'm lucky enough to see it every few days), spare a thought for JA Baker, and thank him for turning his singular obsession into a true work of art that continues to inspire. BW

SALTMARSH COAST TRAIL
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SALTMARSH COAST

Sadly, no Peregrines for Matt today

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Come in, we're OPEN

White plumage seems to make sense for Whooper Swans, which breed in the far north, but it is retained through the year

Snow white and OTHERWISE

Many of our migrant and resident birds have white plumage, including some of our most charismatic winter visitors. **David Callahan** explores what makes them white and why...

WONDERFUL-EARTH.NET/ALAMY

> “IT’S HARD TO IMAGINE THE ADVANTAGE OF WHITE PLUMAGE IN SPECIES THAT ARE WHITE BY DEFAULT”

As the chill descends, our winter migrants begin to settle in. Nowadays, that chill is not as cold as it was, and even though seasonal ice and snow has decreased in recent years across Britain, some wintering bird species remain almost entirely white. The reasons for this colouration might appear obvious, but are not quite as straightforward as they seem.

The true definition of white in feathers is the absence of pigmentation rather than a case of feathers actually being ‘coloured’ white. White is a form of ‘structural colour’ in the keratin that makes up feathers, an optical effect caused by the ways in which the finer elements of feathers reflect light. The feather microstructures scatter the light they receive equally, not refracting the different wavelengths of the spectrum that make what we perceive as colours visible to our eyes.

Many species are honed by evolution to be white, with feathers and colours adapted for specific lifestyles. However, others can become ‘bleached’ by sunlight and wear, and there is also the random occurrence of white feathers we loosely term ‘leucism’ and albinism, which are genetic in origin.

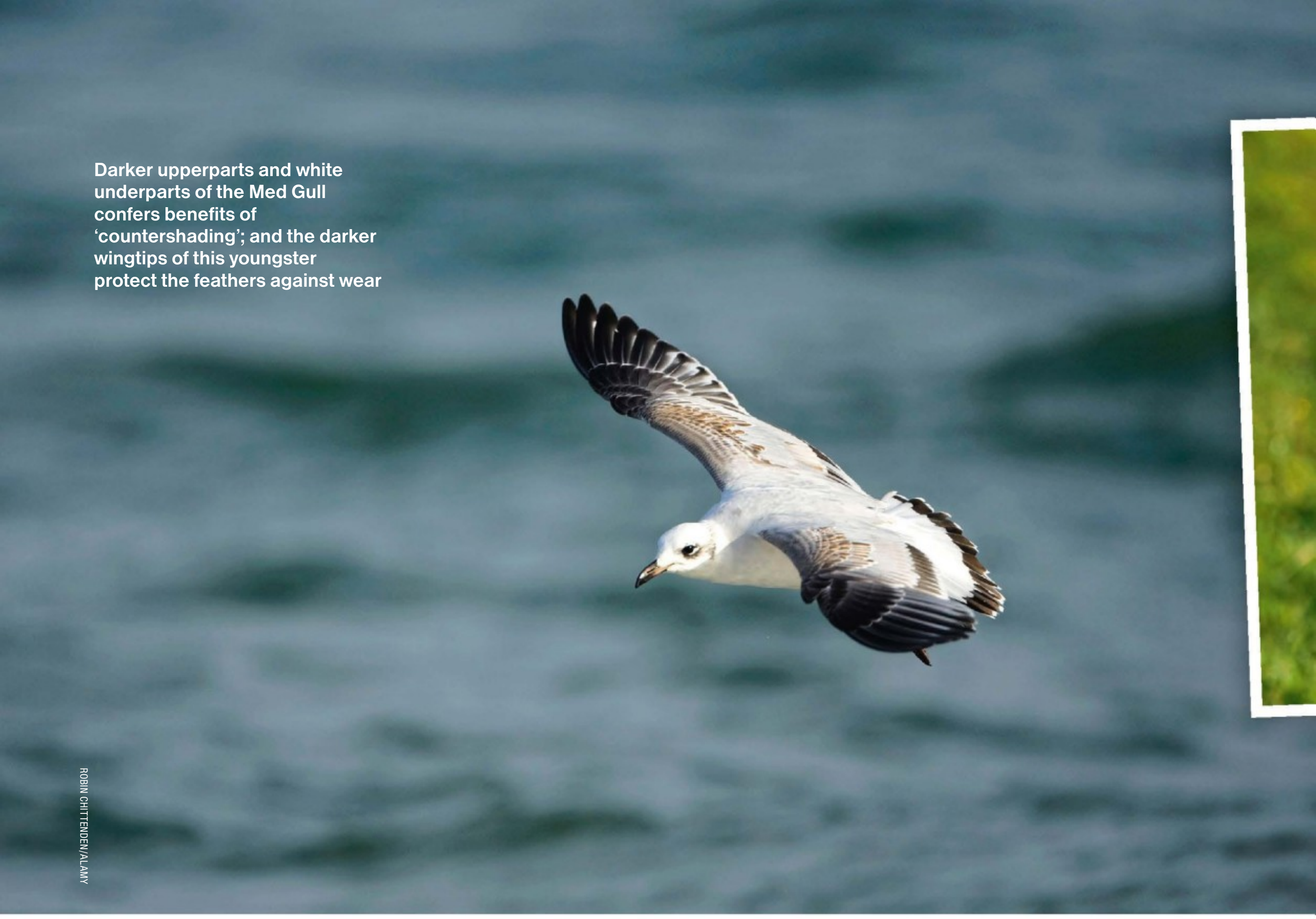
The often asymmetrical and partial white of leucism derives from an inherited lack of the pigment melanin. Yellowish and reddish tinges can show in the feathers as natural carotenoid pigments are not affected in leucism. Leucism is an umbrella term for several different conditions in the pigment-producing chromatophore cells that cause ‘dilution’ or lightening of the plumage.

Albinism has a different origin to leucism, despite similarities. A non-inherited, random genetic mutation in the chromatophores causes an absence of the tyrosinase enzyme needed for melanin production. Albinism is a lack of all melanin, resulting in pure white plumage and pink bare parts, due to tiny blood vessels becoming visible. Yellows, oranges and reds can also be present from retained carotenoids.

Leucistic conditions and albinism can be differentiated by eye colour: leucistic birds have pigmented irises while albino individuals have translucent pink eyes. Unusually pale birds stand out to predators, and whiteness also weakens the feathers, causing them to wear and break more rapidly, while eyesight is weak. These factors mean albinos don’t usually survive long in the wild.

Above the treeline

As albino birds are so easily predated upon or injured, it’s hard to imagine the advantage of white plumage in species that are white ‘by default’. However, no bird species is completely white. Juvenile Spoonbills have black tips to their wing feathers and adults retain black bare parts, while Snow Buntings are camouflaged with black and brown on



Darker upperparts and white underparts of the Med Gull confers benefits of ‘countershading’; and the darker wingtips of this youngster protect the feathers against wear

ROBIN CHITTENDEN/ALAMY

their upperparts and pale orange around their heads. White plumage serves different purposes for different species.

The most dramatic white winter plumage in Britain is probably that of the Ptarmigan, a circumpolar grouse that lives above the treeline in the Highlands of Scotland. Ptarmigans are shapeshifters of the snowy peaks, disappearing into snow banks more efficiently than Homer Simpson into a hedge. They are perfectly insulated against the cold from the eyelids down to the soles of the feet, with white feathers making them virtually invisible against snow. But even in spring and summer, breeding hen Ptarmigans are so well concealed in their blotchy grey finery that Arctic Foxes (not in the UK, of course) can pass unknowingly within feet of sitting birds on the tundra.

Ptarmigan camouflage changes seasonally. Their plumage after a complete moult is white, with day-length influencing the hormones that control moulting into darker plumage in spring (the ‘display plumage’) and late summer (the more cryptic autumn plumage). Darker plumage with white patches is traditionally timed for nesting when the ground is snow-free, with another darker partial moult when the feathers are worn, due to the stresses of breeding.

Ptarmigans are an appetising species and blending into the background helps avoid predation. However, climate change is advancing substantially quicker than plumage evolution. As thawing slowly gets earlier in the year, it leaves the white-plumaged winter birds as sitting ducks for Golden Eagles. As Scotland gets warmer and wetter, Ptarmigans also need to move higher for their camouflage to work. Their exceptional insulation is also unsuited to warmer climates and their future is looking bleaker than a wind-swept mountainside.

Similar worries concern Snow Bunting, which also breeds in the Cairngorms. It’s already a fixture on the official list of rare breeding birds, with no more than 46 pairs remaining in 2022 (although some areas have not been surveyed for longer). In winter, their numbers are bolstered by an ever decreasing influx of birds from Iceland and Fennoscandia, with 11,250 in the country at the last estimate. It is not yet considered as endangered globally but the British breeding population is rapidly declining.

Juvenile Spoonbill’s dark primary tips suffer less wear

FLPA/ALAMY

Snow Buntings have a more varied plumage, with white concentrated on the head and underparts and large patches on the wings. The combinations of white, brown and dark grey confer amazing camouflage against the sandy and gravelly beaches of their winter habitats, where they can be surprisingly hard to see.

However the black-and-white, larger males are more ostentatious in the breeding season, when there is no snow on the ground, and the male must show his fitness as a partner to the females in display. His large white patches are attractive to the dowdier females but he risks being more obvious to predators.

Colourfast swans

The benefits of white plumage as camouflage in wintry conditions are obvious. But why are wintering waterbirds such as swans white when they are so often not in snowy landscapes? Whooper and Bewick’s Swans breed in the far north but whiteness isn’t very useful in spring as camouflage and is retained throughout the year, making their herds conspicuous on a Northumberland stubble field.

Breeding birds of any size are vulnerable, as they have to stay faithful to their nests, becoming a magnet to roaming predators. Swans are large and aggressive defenders of their nest sites and are powerful flyers,

On the face of it, Little Egret's colour is of no advantage

GEOFF SMITH/ALAMY

In winter, male Snow Buntings have subtle brown/orange plumage (in addition to white), providing camouflage

WILDLIFE GMBH/ALAMY

assembling in large post-breeding flocks that are daunting to terrestrial and airborne predators. The whiteness of swans appears to have little purpose despite this. We don't know why our northern hemisphere swans evolved white plumage, but the colour might have been retained simply because any disadvantage is cancelled out by their size, power, aggressiveness and the safety in numbers conferred by herding. Swan survival does not demand a vulnerable full moult, as in Ptarmigan.

The recent increase in numbers and British colonisation by first Little Egret, and then Great and Cattle Egrets and Spoonbill, means that there are large white waterbirds in town. These species have colonised from the south, where camouflage against snow and ice is unnecessary. Yet white they are.

The reasons are complex. White plumage reflects around 80% of radiated light, keeping the birds cool in open and hot environments. White colouration can also camouflage these otherwise overbearing piscivores against the sky, when viewed from the position of a fish. This complicates some species' fishing methods. Spoonbills tend to frenetically filter water through their spatulate beaks, an energy inefficient method that has been shown to catch less prey than egrets, which are stalkers and ambushers. Egrets often hang around the edges of pools where Spoonbills are hunting, picking off fish and invertebrates as they frantically try to escape the open water.

> “MALE SNOW BUNTINGS' WHITE PATCHES ARE ATTRACTIVE TO MATES BUT MORE OBVIOUS TO PREDATORS”

Studies of the American Reddish Egret, which has two colour morphs, show that there are advantages in both white and dark plumage. Dark birds spent more time in shallow water, where they stand still creating shade to attract prey as a kind of fake shelter, while white individuals spent more time actively hunting in deeper water. It seems that the two colour morphs are almost equally suited to hunting in shallow water, but the variation enables more food sources to be exploited by the same species.

In some cases, darker feathers containing melanin are present on otherwise white birds to help reduce wear, as the pigment strengthens the ends of feathers in particular. Juvenile Spoonbills and Mediterranean Gulls have dark primary tips despite the all-white wings of their parents, enabling them to make it through immaturity with less wear.

As above, so below

The relative invisibility conferred by white plumage against the sky also explains why so many seabirds have white underparts. Gulls and terns have dark upperparts contrasting with white underparts, an effect called 'countershading' and acts as camouflage from above and below., means an object can be made less conspicuous by a colouration that counters that created by overhead light, and is key to explaining how much camouflage works. Having a dark upper side and pale underside interferes with the patterns created by 'normal' light in the brain and obscures the depths, sizes and shapes of objects. A counter-shaded bird appears more two-dimensional from above and below, concealing its true shape and size. Counter-shading also works in the favour of wintering birds of prey – think of Short-eared and Barn Owls sailing low over frosty grasslands or buzzards and falcons shooting fast across a pale sky.

The majority of British seabirds and waterbirds have dark dorsal and pale ventral sides in winter, but countershading is often lost in breeding plumage, when birds need to stand out to potential mates. White can also aid camouflage in combination with darker plumage features. The dark stripes on the heads of plovers appear bold contrast with their white underparts help break up their outlines on their sand and mud substrates during display and breeding. This is termed 'disruptive colouration', and becomes less pronounced in winter when the birds are more able to fly away without having to return to a nest site.

As with many conditions in nature, having white plumage does not offer the same advantages to every species. The qualities of the colour white allow defensive and predatory camouflage in more than just icy environments, but as our climate warms white birds from the south will be adapted to the changing conditions in ways that more northern white birds are not. We are in a period of flux where we can enjoy all of these species in Britain at once – but we may not be so lucky in future. BW

RUTH MILLER

Going for 200

Need inspiration for 2025's #My200BirdYear challenge? **Ruth Miller** helped some birders hit 2024's target...

If you have joined in *Bird Watching* magazine's #My200BirdYear, you may have found it the perfect excuse to go birdwatching regularly throughout the year to connect with different species in different seasons. And autumn birding will give your list a real boost as migrant birds start to return, sometimes bringing with them a bonus scarce or rare bird. In my opinion, there is no better place to experience autumn migration than on the east Yorkshire coast. Which is why we were on Flamborough Head early morning in late September with Tony and Eva, as Tony was close to achieving his 200 species for the year.

We had headed out pre-dawn to get to Flamborough Head at first light to do some seawatching and were rewarded with Arctic Skuas, Red-throated Divers, Gannets, and Razorbills flying past; not necessarily new for Tony's list, but a great start to the day. Later on, we heard news of a Red-breasted Flycatcher and Icterine Warbler near some sewage works next to the Viking Hotel on the North Landing. These would both be new for Tony's list, so we made a beeline for a patch of rough ground that overlooked the sewage works, lined on our side by a hedge of scrubby bushes and on the far side by taller trees. We'd barely set up our telescopes before we caught sight of a Red-breasted Flycatcher on one of the bushes! But then our attention was caught by a bright spot among the vegetation: this was the Icterine Warbler sitting out to preen on an open branch in the sunshine.

The bird obligingly sat still long enough for us to focus our telescopes giving an excellent view of this stout-billed, lemon-fronted warbler. Then, not one, but two Red-breasted Flycatchers came into view as they worked along the hedgerow. Add into the mix a Yellow-browed Warbler that popped up from time to time and there was certainly plenty to entertain the group of birdwatchers who had joined us in the September sunshine.

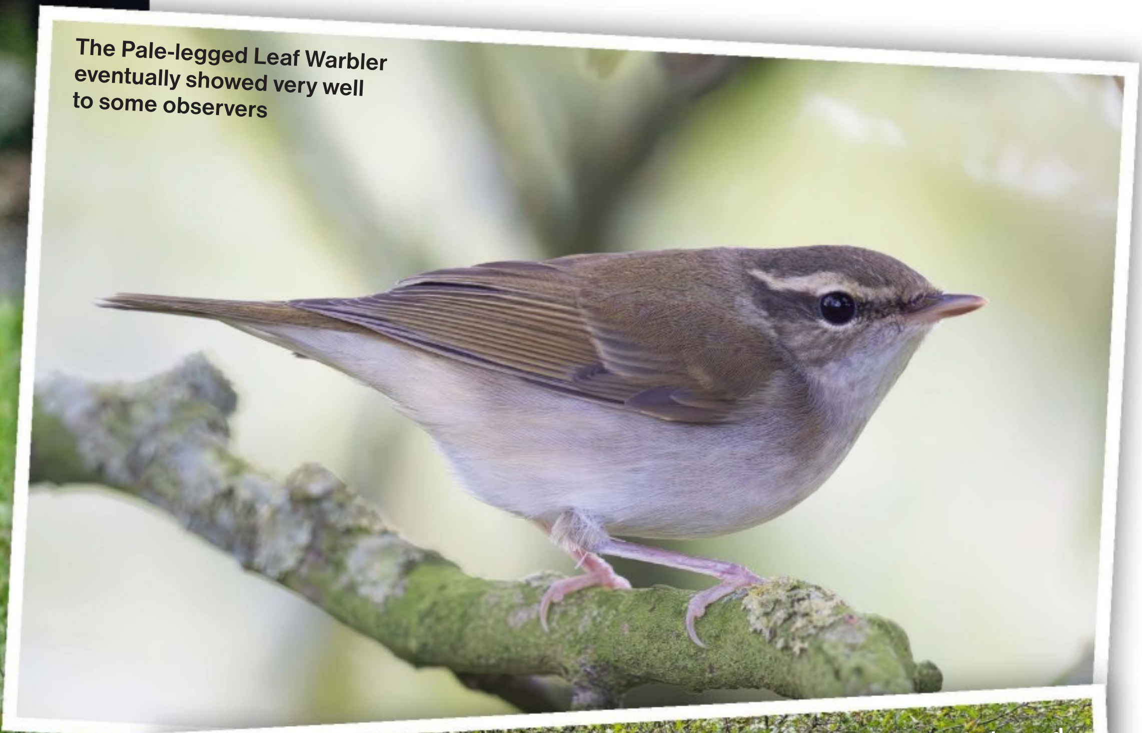
No time to lose, however; we had more birds to look for to add to Tony's year list and we headed over to RSPB Bempton Cliffs reserve in search of a very rare bird indeed: Pale-legged Leaf Warbler. This amazing bird, more usually seen in Asia where we had in fact seen it in Thailand a few years ago, had initially been spotted at Bempton Cliffs a few days earlier. Being a real skulker, the bird only gave a fleeting glimpse and was initially thought to be an Arctic Warbler. We were in fact only a few feet away from it at the time and we looked for the bird, but in vain.

However, having enjoyed glorious views of another Arctic Warbler earlier that day, we didn't feel too cheated. Shortly after, the bird was "re-identified" as an Eastern Crowned Warbler, a rarer and hard-to-identify bird, but we weren't in the area to look for it again. On its third incarnation, the bird was finally identified, thanks to a sound recording of its call, as a Pale-legged Leaf Warbler. This was the first time that a live bird had ever been recorded in Europe (in October 2016, a Pale-legged Leaf Warbler turned up on the Isles of Scilly but the unfortunate bird flew into a window and died before anybody saw it alive), so birders were coming from far and wide to see the 2024 bird.

Imagining the football crowd packed into the confines of the RSPB reserve to see this rarity as soon as possible, we played it cool and waited

A Hoopoe was a nice bonus

RUTH MILLER


The Pale-legged Leaf Warbler eventually showed very well to some observers

DAVID CARR

Waiting for the Bempton Pale-legged Leaf Warbler: The birding equivalent of Where's Wally?

RUTH MILLER

until the afternoon, keeping fingers crossed that the paparazzi wouldn't spook the bird. Even so, we struggled to find space in the overflow car park, and it wasn't hard to guess from the throng where the bird had last been seen. Good news: it was still here. Bad news: it was being pretty elusive, as it followed a circuit through the bushes; a short hop through the middle for a bird, but a much longer run round the outside for mankind. When the word went up that it had been relocated, most of the birders and photographers rushed off in hot pursuit. Again, we played it cool, held our nerve and stayed put, relying on the bird to complete its circuit and return to our area. Our plan worked a treat and when the warbler came back, we had shuffled right to the front. By bending down and looking under the branches where the bird flitted down to the ground and back up, we enjoyed frame-filling views of this striking warbler: pale supercilium, faint wing-bars, pale underparts and of course those eponymous pale pink legs. What a cracking addition to Tony's 2024 list!

And still there was more. On our way back to our base at Beverley we took a small detour to look for another migrant bird on a housing estate on the edge of Hull. An unlikely setting, you might think, for an exotic Hoopoe. However, the layout of open grassy squares surrounded by terraced houses provided to be the perfect location for this bird, which was entertaining locals and visiting birdwatchers alike as it probed the soft grass with its dagger-like bill for tasty invertebrates. Rather like the warbler, it too had a preferred circuit, and it led us a merry dance around the grassy parks of the estate. This was not without its benefits, though, as, following the Hoopoe round a corner, we were rewarded with not only the bird again right at our feet but also a flock of four Ring-necked Parakeets exploding from the trees above us. Two more exciting species for Tony to add to his tally.

So, if you are considering the #My200BirdYear challenge in 2025, my advice would be to go for it and enjoy the ride. You never know where it may take you, but one thing's for sure, it will be fun!

Ruth Miller is one half of The Biggest Twitch team, and along with partner Alan Davies, set the then world record for most bird species seen in a year – 4,341, in 2008, an experience they wrote about in their book, The Biggest Twitch. Indeed, Ruth is still the female world record-holder! As well as her work as a tour leader, she is the author of the Birds, Boots and Butties books, on walking, birding and tea-drinking in North Wales, and previously worked as the RSPB's head of trading. She lives in North Wales.

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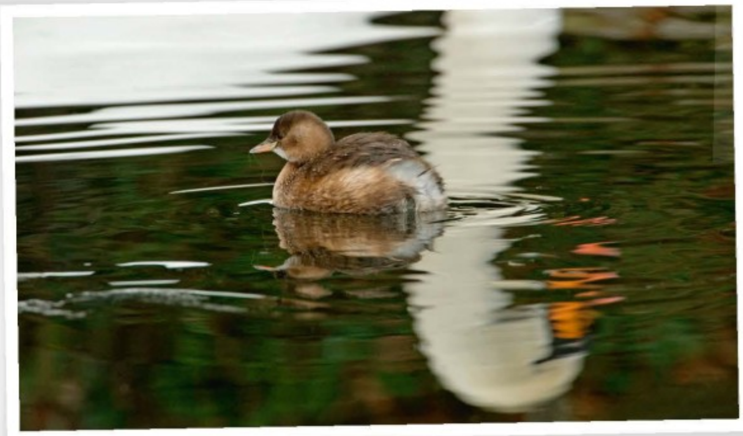
IDChallenge

This month's challenge is all about the identification of swans and their ilk

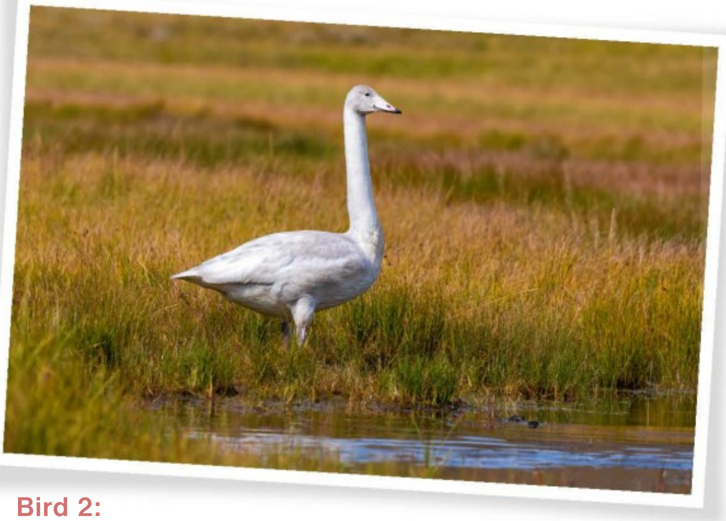
Swans are not a very diverse group of birds, with just three species occurring regularly 'in the wild' in this country. So, this ID Challenge should be pretty straightforward, shouldn't it? But every group of birds, be it a taxonomic group or a cluster which shares a habitat, deserves its turn on these puzzle pages. After all, identification skills should not be restricted to those birds which are very diverse and very tricky to tell apart.

Can you put a name to these swans, or should we say, swan-like birds, as we don't necessarily want to repeat the species on this page… All you need to do, if you accept the challenge, is to put a name to each species, then turn the page to check the true identity, and the reasoning we used to name them. Then, as a final treat, if you need it, please turn the page once more, to see a brief, bullet-pointed ID guide to the regular British swan species. Good luck.

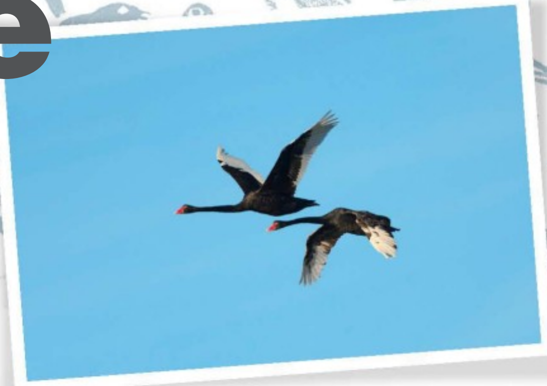
CAN YOU NAME THESE SWANS/SWAN-LIKE BIRDS?



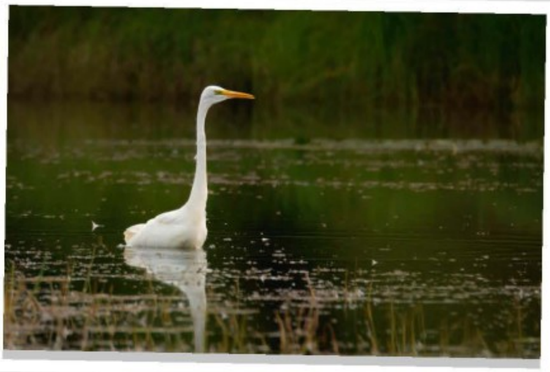
Bird 1:



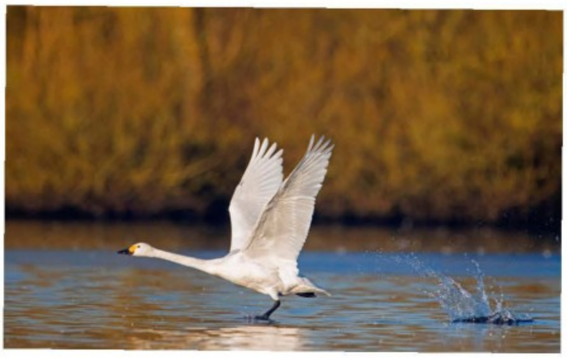
Bird 2:



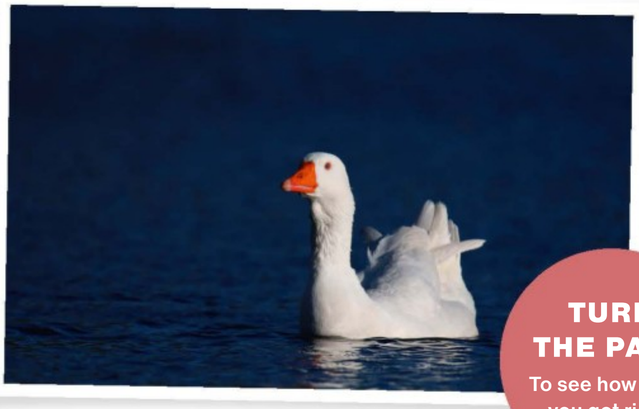
Bird 3:



Bird 4:



Bird 5:



Bird 6:

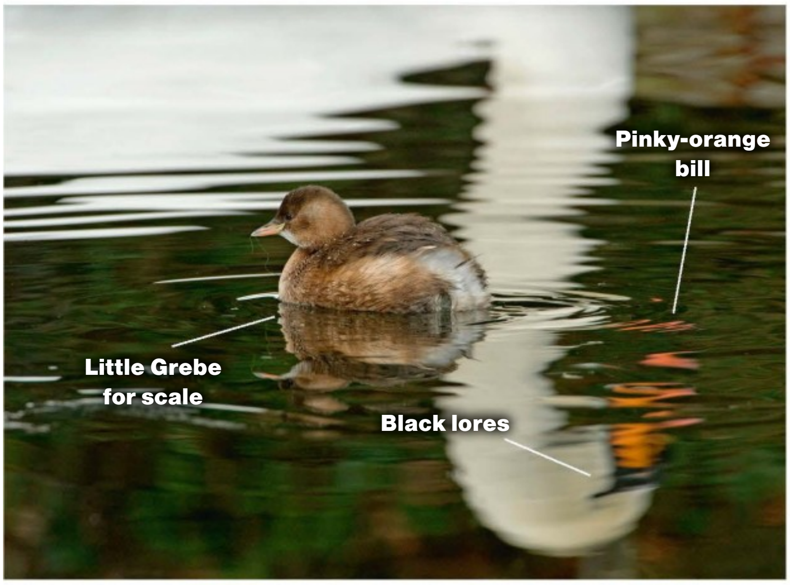
TURN THE PAGE

To see how many you got right!

Answers & solutions

Check your answers against our explanations. Remember, there are no 'trick' birds or extreme rarities among these...

ID TIP!
Though not a hard and fast rule, Mute Swans tend to be much tamer than the usually wary Whooper and Bewick's Swans



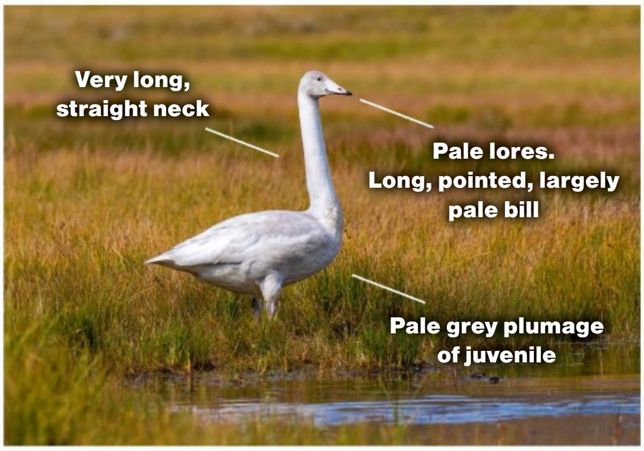
HEATHER ANGEL, NATURAL VISIONS/ALAMY

BIRD 1

"Hold on a cotton-picking second, you said this was all about swans and their ilk, and this is a small, fluffy, brown waterbird. What is going on?" You thought we would make it too easy? Look beyond the little brown waterbird (which is a Little Grebe) and you will see a reflection of a swan's head and neck, upside-down of course, and somewhat rippled (blame the grebe). Using the grebe for scale, this is a massive bird, its head being roughly Dabchick-sized! The bill is pinky-orange, and crucially, the lores (the area between the eye and the bill) are black. Only one swan fits this bill (excuse the pun); this is a **Mute Swan**.

Key features

- Little Grebe for scale
- Pinky-orange bill with black lores
- Gentle, elegant curve of neck
- Neck notably thick


Very long, straight neck
Pale lores. Long, pointed, largely pale bill
Pale grey plumage of juvenile

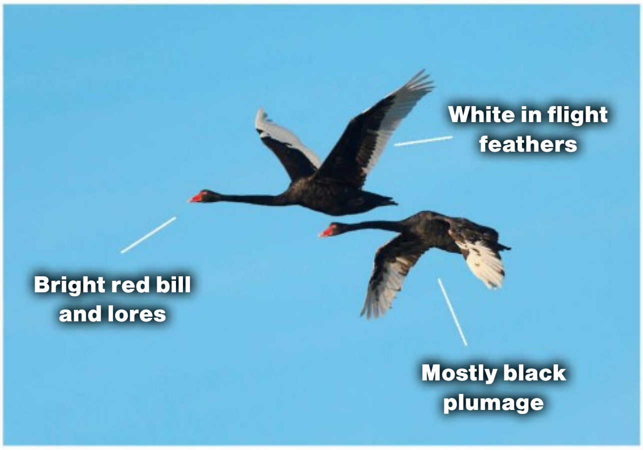
VINCENT LEGRAND, AGAMI PHOTO AGENCY/ALAMY

BIRD 2

Here is a pale grey waterfowl with a very long, straight, slender neck and a long, triangular bill. No ducks, or even geese, have necks this long, so this must be a swan's, which judging by the grey plumage is a youngster (they turn pure white after a couple of years). The first thing to look at on such a swan is the colour of the lores, which are wholly pale; it can't be a (black-lored) Mute Swan. This narrows it down to Whooper or Bewick's. The pale on the lores extends down the bill almost to the bill tip, so this is a juvenile **Whooper Swan**. This is backed up by the very long neck, and long bill. The bill and lores will only turn yellow as it becomes a white adult.

Key features

- Pale lores; long, mainly pale bill with dark tip
- Very long thin neck
- Neck held very straight and upright
- Rather uniform, pale grey, plumage (of juvenile)



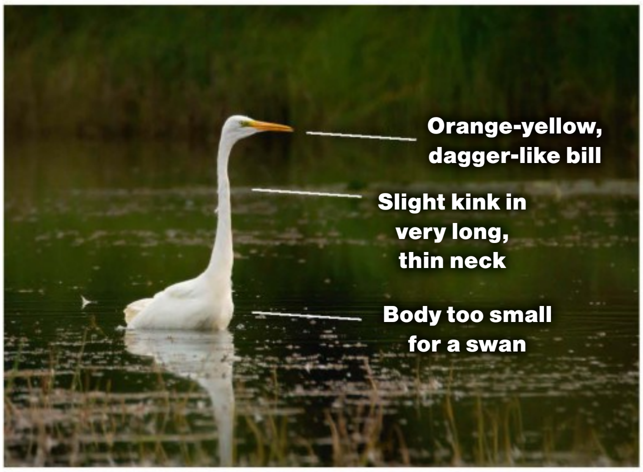
GENEVIEVE VALLEE/ALAMY

BIRD 3

"Hold on a cotton-picking second, you said there were only three species of British swans, and all these are white, not black. What is going on?" Well, there are three 'wild' species of swan in the UK. However, there are also swans which escape from captivity and can survive and breed and potentially become naturalised. The swans in the photograph are very distinctive, being wholly black in plumage apart from white flight feathers. The bill (and lores) are bight red. These are **Black Swans**, endemic in a natural state to Australia, but widely introduced and kept in collections. There may be more than 100 pairs nesting in southern England.

Key features

- Mostly black
- White flight feathers
- Very long, thin neck
- Red lores and bill


Orange-yellow, dagger-like bill
Slight kink in very long, thin neck
Body too small for a swan

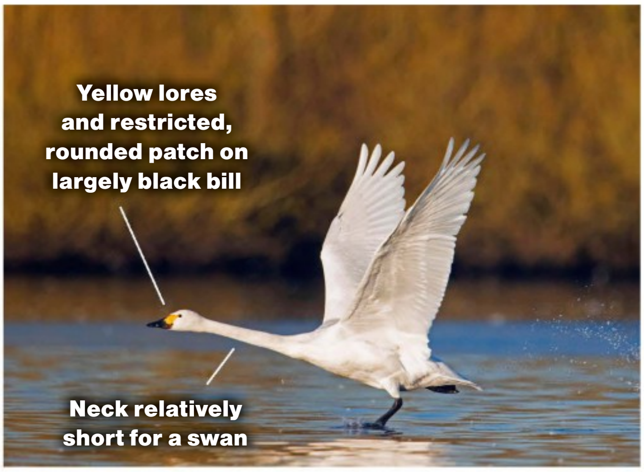
WIRESTOCK/ALAMY

BIRD 4

This white bird has a a very long thin neck and orange-yellow lores. So, it must be a Whooper or Bewick's Swan, right? Except, of course, that the orange-yellow bill is long, thin and dagger shaped, not that of a swan (or any wildfowl) at all. There is a bit of a kink in the neck, too, and that body, though partly submerged in water, is surely not big enough for a swan. Indeed, this bird is shaped more like a heron than a swan, goose or duck. It is, of course, a **Great White Egret**, a bird which is becoming increasingly common in the UK, and believe it or not, a genuine confusion for swans (and vice versa) if seen briefly and badly. They really are that big (standing taller than a Grey Heron), that at a glance they could be mistaken for swans.

Key features

- Very long, thin neck, with a slight 'Adam's apple' kink
- Long, thin (dagger-like) orange-yellow bill
- All white plumage
- Main body too small for a swan!


Yellow lores and restricted, rounded patch on largely black bill
Neck relatively short for a swan

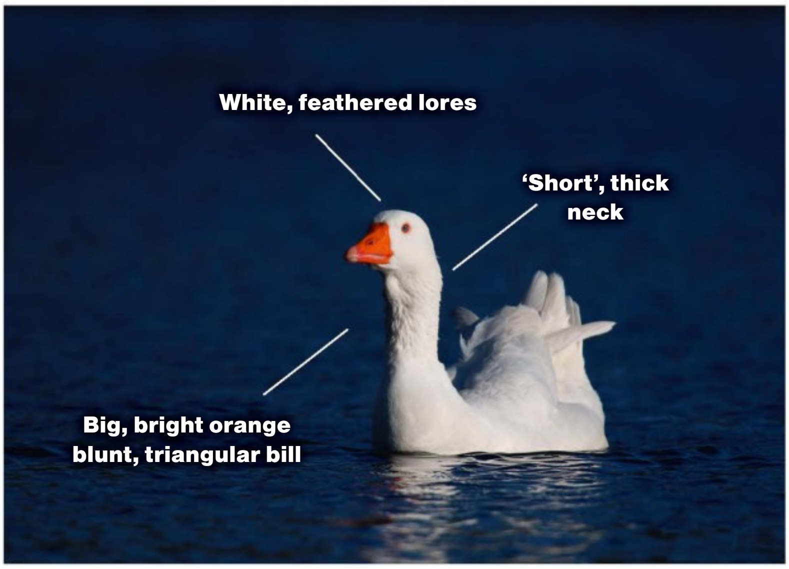
ARNDT SVEN-ERIK, ARTERRA PICTURE LIBRARY/ALAMY

BIRD 5

Now, this bird surely has the right colour, shape and structure for a 'proper' swan. However, a very analytical look may make you think that the neck is a little shorter (proportionately) than a Whooper Swan (compare Bird 2) and maybe a Mute Swan. A crucial look at the lores (area between the eye and bill) will show it is bright yellow, so it is not a Mute Swan (which has black lores). The bill is almost goose-bill-shaped, rather than long and pointed (like a Whooper's). Also, the bill is largely black with a restricted area of yellow, which forms a curved (not angular) yellow basal patch. These features all mean this must be an adult **Bewick's Swan**.

Key features

- All white swan
- Yellow lores
- Small, rounded yellow patch at base of black bill
- Relatively short neck for a swan



SUSAN FELDBERG/ALAMY

BIRD 6

We finish with one more wholly white 'swan', swimming towards the photographer. Using the advice to check the lores first, we can see that there is a feathered area of white between the eye and bill; this is no swan (which would have bare skin there)! Come to think of it, the longish neck is too short and stout and the big (pink-tipped) 'triangular' bill too bright orange to be a proper swan. No, this is what may be called a white **'farmyard goose'**. This sort of domestic goose has been bred (originally from Greylag Geese), to be white and tame (and perhaps good eating or good at egg-laying, or guarding property...). It is probably more of a confusion species with rare Snow Geese than swans.

Key features

- All white plumage
- Neck too short for a swan
- Large, triangle, bright orange bill (feathered lores)
- Shaped like a goose!

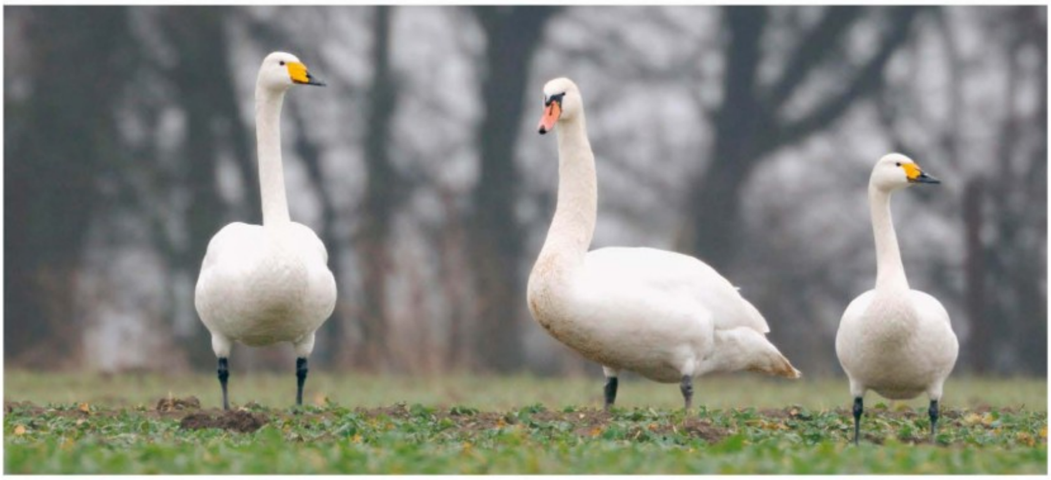
MY FAVOURITE SITE "THOUSANDS OF WHOOPER SWANS WINTER AROUND THE NENE WASHES, CAMBS. QUITE MAGNIFICENT!" **MIKE WEEDON, ASSISTANT EDITOR**

ID Tips & tricks

Here are a few extra tips to help you identify swans

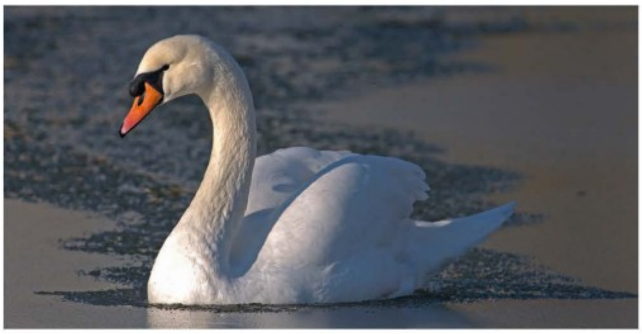
ID TIP!

Only Mute Swans make the distinctive, loud whistling sounds from the wings in flight (the other two prefer to honk!)



WONDERFUL-EARTH.NET/ALAMY

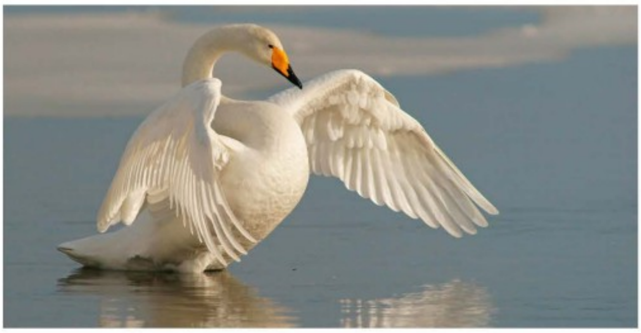
An unusual photograph showing all three swan species side by side, allowing direct comparison of size, shape, and bill shape and pattern, between: Whooper Swan (left) Mute Swan (centre), and Bewick's Swan (right)



CHRIS GRADY/ALAMY

Mute Swan

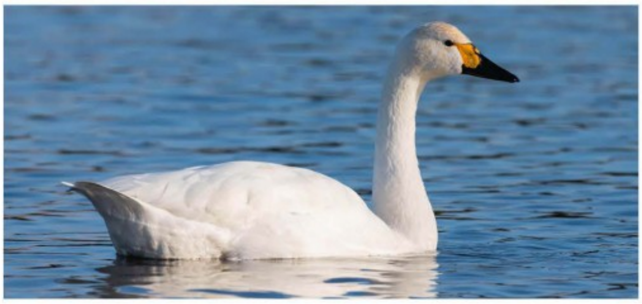
- Very large, long-necked white swan
- Black lores
- Pinky-orange bill with black 'knob' at base, larger in males
- Usually holds neck in 'graceful' curve when swimming
- Uniquely, often holds wings above body
- Voice a mix of odd 'sneezy' notes and nasal whistles



MARKO KÖNIG, IMAGEBROKER.COM GMBH & CO. KG/ALAMY

Whooper Swan

- Very large, long-necked white swan
- Yellow lores
- Angular basal yellow patch on triangular black bill; no bill 'knob'
- Usually holds neck straight (vertical) when standing or swimming
- Wings flat on body when standing or swimming
- Voice a distinctive, barking 'honk', deeper than Bewick's



CHRIS GRADY/ALAMY

Bewick's Swan

- 'Pint-sized', relatively short-necked white swan
- Yellow lores
- Rounded basal yellow patch on goose-like black bill; no bill 'knob'
- Usually holds neck straight (vertical) when standing or swimming
- Wings flat on body when standing or swimming
- Voice a distinctive yapping 'honk', higher pitched than Whooper

SNAP IT!

Have you taken a great shot of a swan? If so, please share it! Send your photos to: birdwatching@bauermedia.co.uk

NEXT MONTH'S CHALLENGE

Birds in snow

BRIAN HEWITT/ALAMY

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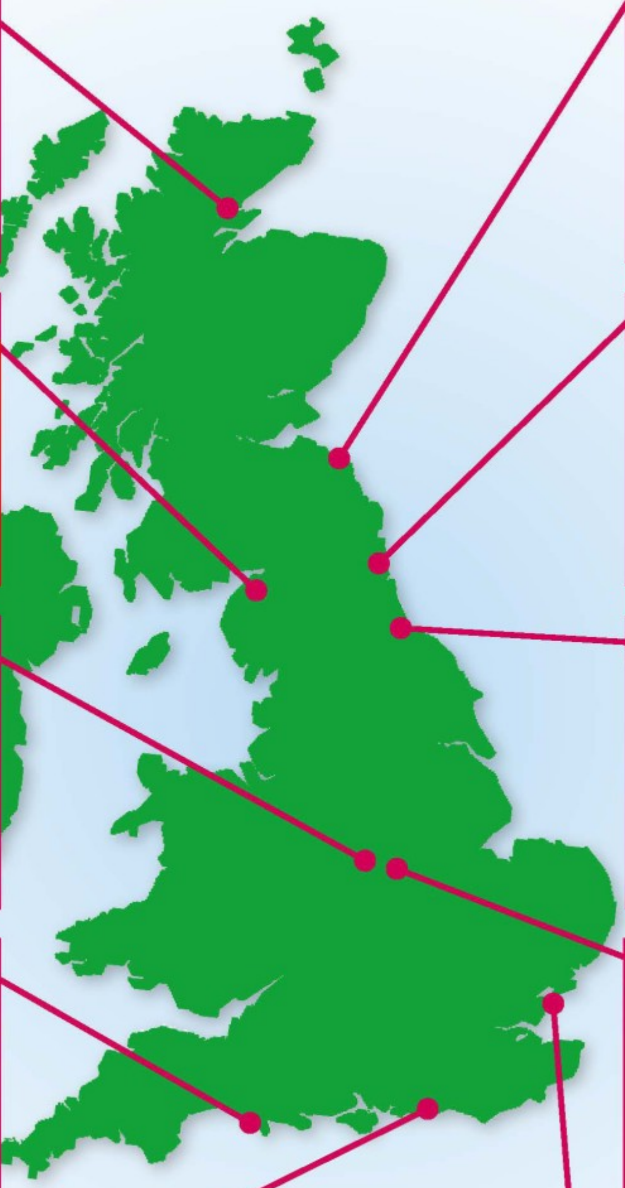
GO BIRDING

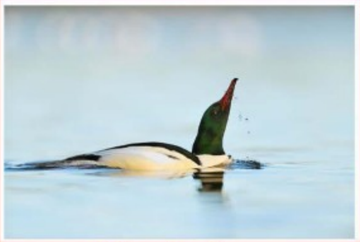
10 great sites for brilliant birdwatching



DORNOCH

ABBEY ST BATHANS

COOMBS WOOD



TYNE DERWENT WAY

RATBY BURROUGHS

GREATHAM CREEK

FLEET

WAKERLEY GREAT WOOD

MORE SITES

For a full list of the sites we've featured, go to *birdwatching.co.uk/gbindex*

GO BIRDING INDEX

ARUNDEL PARK

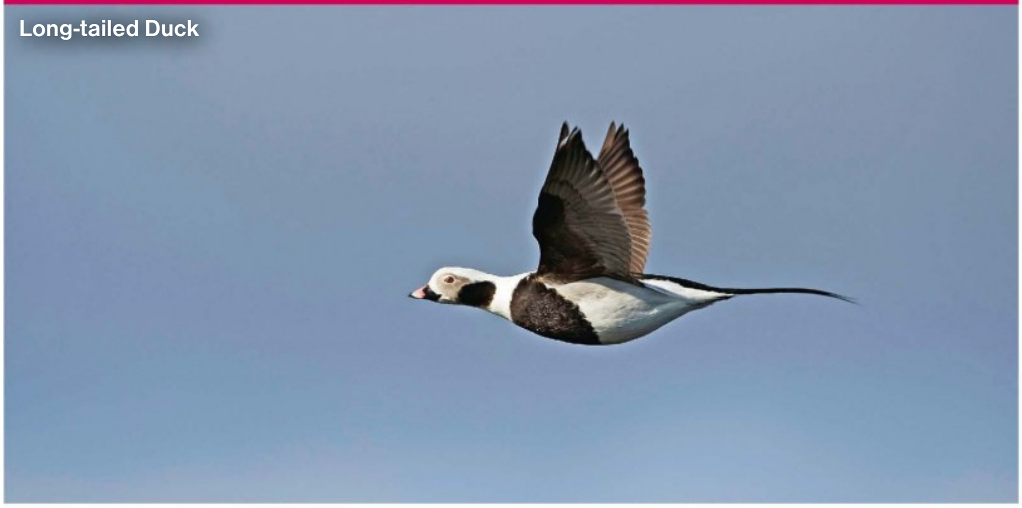
BRIGHTLINGSEA

HIGHLAND

DORNOCH

MAX MILES ON FOOT: 4 **MIN TIME:** 3 HOURS

Seawatching and a range of migrant passerines



Long-tailed Duck

DAVID TIPLING PHOTO LIBRARY/ALAMY

Dornoch may be best known for its 'world class' golf course, but the area is also a magnet for birds, with plenty of great habitats around the area.

JOHN MILES

WHERE TO WATCH

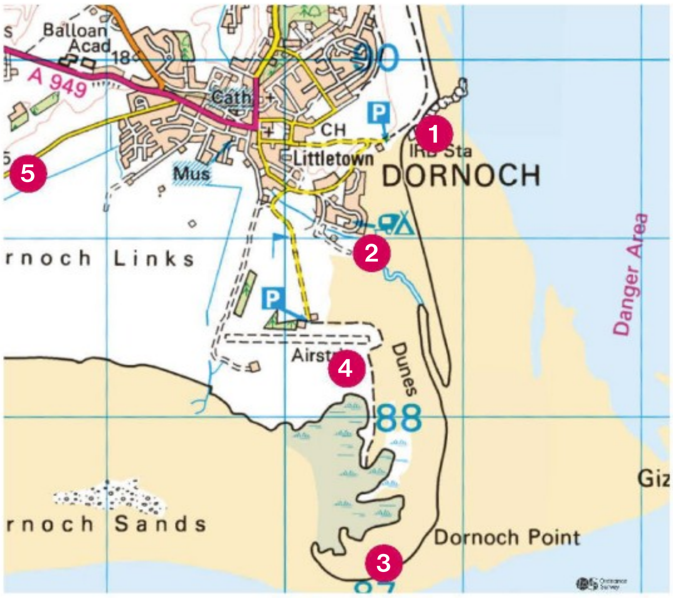
1 Here is an ideal location to do a bit of seawatching right next to the famous course. A car park allows you to use your vehicle as a hide, with chances of Gannet, Kittiwake, auks and plenty of gulls. Looking out in winter, there may be a scoter flock which has held both Velvet and Surf Scoter, also with the chance of passing divers and Long-tailed Duck, with even a shout for a King Eider.

2 At low tide, you can walk down the beach, checking for migrants in spring like White and Pied Wagtails, Wheatear and Sand Martin. The Dornoch Burn drops to the beach offering a few wintering duck species like Teal and Wigeon, plus Snipe and Ringed Plover. Check your pipits, as both Scandinavian Rock and Water Pipits have been found.

3 Dornoch Point is a great place to scan the incoming tide, checking movement in Dornoch Firth. Check through the Eider for anything like a 'northern' Eider; or the Red-breasted Mergansers for a Goosander. Divers are likely, with Red-throated the commonest here, but Great Northern and Black-throated have been found. Also check the beach for Snow Buntings in winter, along with a good flock of Twite.

4 Inland of the dunes are flashes where waders can gather, like Dunlin and Ringed Plover. Check for migrants in autumn, like Curlew Sandpiper, Little Stint and Little Ringed Plover. Even a Baird's Sandpiper has been found. You can walk back via the airfield with migrants on your mind, with a Hoopoe found on the Struie golf course and both Rose-coloured Starling and Yellow-browed Warbler seen in town.

5 Try the Sutherland Road for geese, with Pink-footed flocks adding both European and Greenland Whitefronts, while a Tundra Bean was a great recent find. The big bird of 2024 was a singing Blyth's Reed Warbler, but if you want to photograph Ospreys, try the fish farm down this road. Sydera Wood here can add Crossbill, Siskin and Goldcrest with raptors like Buzzard, Sparrowhawk and Kestrel likely.



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PRACTICAL INFO

POSTCODE: IV25 3LX
GRID REF: NH 806 895
MAPS: OS Explorer 438, OS Landranger 21
PARKING: Several car parks around the area
TERRAIN: Sandy around the dunes
ACCESSIBILITY: All year round
FACILITIES: Many shops and restaurants in town

INSIDER KNOWLEDGE

Ideal location to look at coastal plants like Kidney Vetch, Grass of Parnassus, Twayblade and Frog Orchid

DAVID CHAPMAN/ALAMY

TARGET SPECIES AUTUMN/WINTER

- Pink-footed Goose
- Common Scoter
- Goldeneye
- Red-breasted Merganser
- Eider
- Red-throated Diver
- Turnstone
- Dunlin
- Twite
- Snow Bunting

SPRING/SUMMER

- Common Tern
- Arctic Tern
- Wheatear
- Whitethroat
- Whimbrel
- Ringed Plover
- Sanderling
- Sky Lark
- Meadow Pipit

MAX MILES ON FOOT: 2 **MIN TIME:** 2 HOURS

ABBEY ST BATHANS

Ancient woodland, commercial forestry, farm and riverside

Abbey St Bathans is a linear, scattered village which lies alongside the Whiteadder Water in a steep heavily wooded gorge in the Lammermuir Hills. Five miles north of Duns, getting to it is by some very minor and often quite narrow, and often steeply ascending and descending, roads. At first sight it does not seem promising, but patience is the name of the game here. In spring and summer, Common Sandpiper can be found, and a variety of warblers and other migrants are in the oak woods. Green Woodpecker and Marsh Tit are present here, and in spring cuckoos are often heard.

STEVE NEWMAN

Siskin
BRIAN CHARD/ALAMY

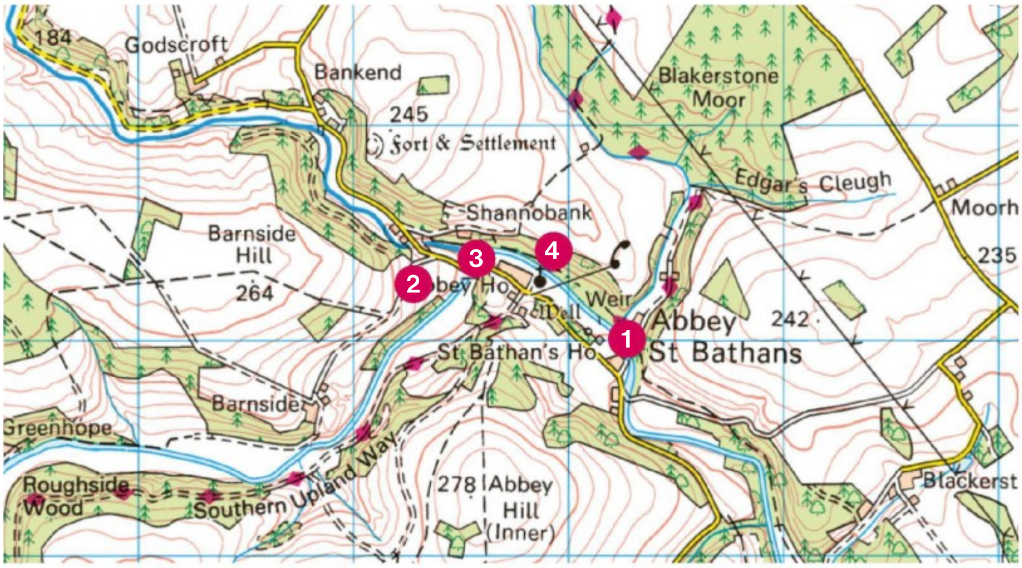
WHERE TO WATCH

1 The car park is bordered on two sides by mixed woodland. You can also walk down the river to the ford, which at this point is shallow and gravelly. We managed Goldfinch, Marsh Tit, Siskin, Chaffinch and Sparrowhawk.

2 To the west of the bridge is a wide steep track leading to Barnside. A couple of hundred yards along, you can stop and scan the river and forestry opposite for Green Woodpecker, Nuthatch, and occasional raptors such as Sparrowhawk. Kingfisher was sighted recently but is still a rare bird here.

3 The bridge allows views of both lengths of the river here. There is a large sandy cliff to the north overlooking the river and we did see Swallow and House Martin around. We also got Dipper, Mallard, Grey Heron and Pied Wagtail.

4 Walking eastwards from the bridge, go past the farm buildings and take the footbridge over the river below the church. This follows the north bank of the river trhoight the oak woodlands and comes out at another bridge above the ford below the car park. Expect Treecreeper, Willow Warbler, Swallow, Common Sandpiper and Grey Wagtail.



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PRACTICAL INFO

POSTCODE: TD11 3TX
GRID REF: NT 757 623
MAPS: OS Explorer 346, OS Landranger 67
PARKING: Free parking for up to 20 cars at the riverside car park next to the ford. Please make sure not to block access the business buildings
TERRAIN: Mostly flat but a steep slow climb up to the Barnside viewpoint. Woody circular path on the north of the river can be muddy in places
ACCESSIBILITY: Open all year
FACILITIES: The Woodlands Café has an excellent reputation but has restricted opening times. Duns has cafés, toilets and pubs

INSIDER KNOWLEDGE

Red Squirrel and Roe Deer can be seen here

BLICKWINKEL/ALAMY

TARGET SPECIES

WINTER
- Sparrowhawk
- Fieldfare
- Brambling

SPRING
- Wheatear
- Common Sandpiper
- Whitethroat

SUMMER
- Green Woodpecker
- Siskin
- Marsh Tit

AUTUMN
- Grey Heron
- Long-tailed Tit
- Goosander

CUMBRIA

MAX MILES ON FOOT: 4 **MIN TIME:** 3 HOURS

COOMBS WOOD

Oak wood specialities plus a variety of other birds

Goosander

FERGUS GILL, NATURE PICTURE LIBRARY/ALAMY

Coombs Wood is found in the picturesque Cumbrian village of Armathwaite, with its beautiful red sandstone cliffs and the rapids in the River Eden, splitting the village in two. It offers a good variety of bird life.

JOHN MILES

WHERE TO WATCH

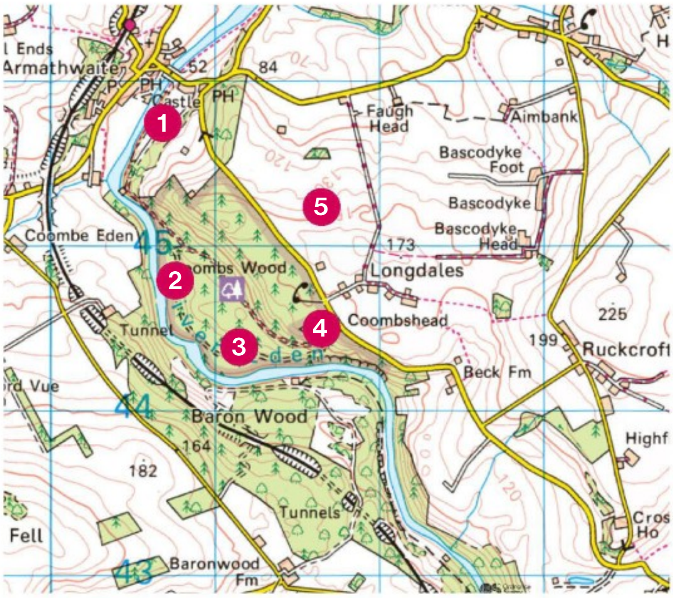
1 You can easily do a circular walk around this wood and back via the road. Parking by the bridge over the River Eden, you can first look down stream towards a Cormorant roost which can contain up to 20 birds. The river is ideal for a number of species, with Goosander and Little Grebe in winter.

2 Spring sees a good number of warblers breeding around the wood, along with Chiffchaff, Willow and Garden Warbler and Blackcap. Great Spotted is now often the only woodpecker species found here, with Little nearly extinct in Cumbria and Green now rare in the north of the county. Nuthatch came to the area in the 1980s, while Treecreeper is common.

3 This once ‘hanging’ oak woodland was clear-felled by Forestry England and planted up with conifers. A section of river bank still has a number of old oak and here you may bump into Pied Flycatcher, Wood Warbler and Redstart. More open sections of the river can have Common Sandpiper here, while the many crags here have Kestrel and even Greylag Goose nesting on them.

4 The conifer areas are ideal for looking for species like Crossbill, Goldcrest and Siskin while raptors like Buzzard, Sparrowhawk and even Goshawk can appear here. Ravens have nested here for a number of years while passing Osprey, Hobby and Red Kite are likely.

5 Walking back by the road gives a chance of farmland birds. Both Rook and Jackdaw are common, with a mixture of finches like Chaffinch, Goldfinch and Greenfinch. Yellowhammers are becoming much scarcer to find these days, while Tree Sparrow tends to use garden nest boxes. Check the pigeons for any sign of Stock Dove while evening walks can bring both Barn and Tawny Owl, with a roding Woodcock in summer.



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PRACTICAL INFO

POSTCODE: CA4 9PY
GRID REF: NY 507 460
MAPS: OS Explorer OL4, OS Landranger 86
PARKING: Park along the bridge by the side of the road
TERRAIN: Most are solid paths and access tracks but the first river path can be wet in places
ACCESSIBILITY: All year round
FACILITIES: Armathwaite

INSIDER KNOWLEDGE

Look for open areas in the woodland where you could find Slow Worms basking

JACK PERKS/ALAMY

TARGET SPECIES AUTUMN/WINTER

- Cormorant
- Goosander
- Goldeneye
- Little Grebe
- Buzzard
- Goshawk
- Sparrowhawk
- Kestrel
- Peregrine
- Raven

SPRING/SUMMER

- Willow Warbler
- Chiffchaff
- Blackcap
- Garden Warbler
- Wood Warbler
- Redstart
- Pied Flycatcher
- Common Sandpiper
- Osprey
- Hobby
- Swift

CO. DURHAM

MAX MILES ON FOOT: 9 **MIN TIME:** 5 HOURS

TYNE DERWENT WAY

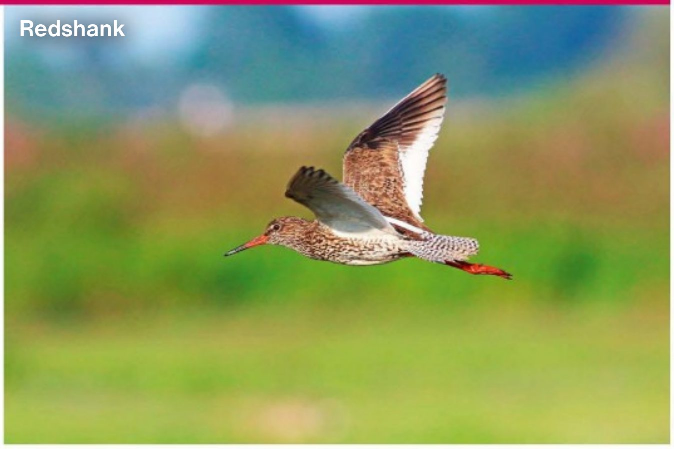
From Gateshead's famous Kittiwakes to iconic Red Kites

Among birders, Gateshead is probably best-known for hosting the world's furthest-inland breeding Kittiwakes, on the Newcastle-Gateshead Quayside, including the St Mary's Heritage Centre, or for being one of the first locations for the UK's Red Kite reintroduction programme. The Tyne Derwent Way, funded by National Government, connects a number of heritage, culture and nature-related attractions along its nine-mile route, and is a great way to see a mix of woodland and estuary birds alongside a series of historic landmarks. You can walk or cycle the whole nine miles, and return by bus, or visit individual stretches of the route separately.

PAUL BROOK

WHERE TO WATCH

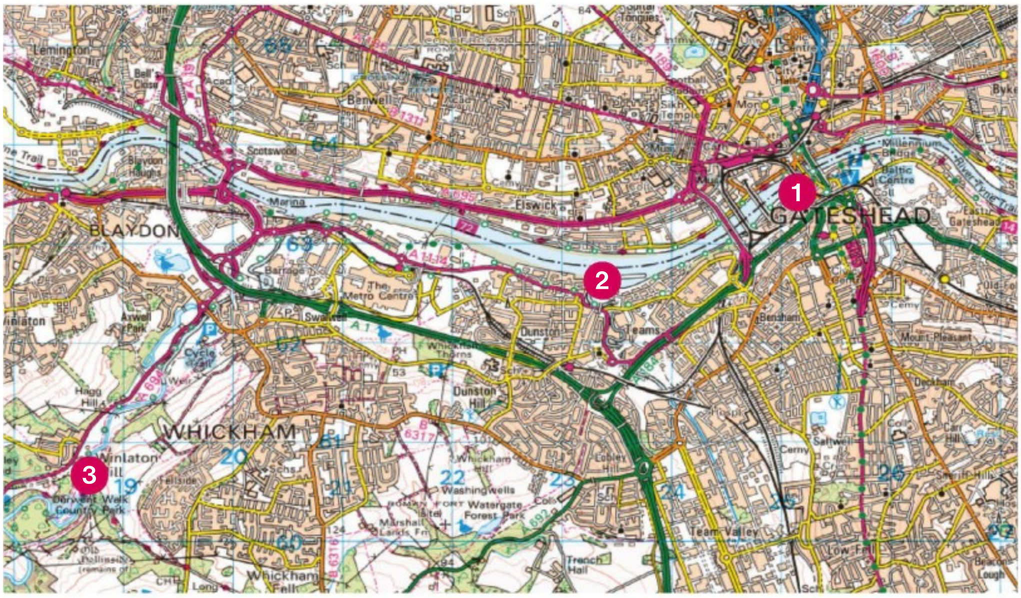
1 Start at St Mary's Heritage Centre, where you'll find nesting Kittiwakes between March and August, and head down into the riverbank woodlands of Gateshead Riverside Park. Look out for the sculptures as well as common woodland birds, including Redwings and mixed tit flocks in winter and Chiffchaffs in summer.


Redshank

GER BOSMA/ALAMY

2 As you emerge by the Tyne, stop to admire the spectacular Dunston Staiths, thought to be the largest wooden structure in Europe. It's worth spending time here at any time of year to savour seasonal birding highlights, especially waders, which commonly include Redshank, Curlew and Lapwing, but might also feature migrating Black-tailed Godwit, Spotted Redshank, Common Sandpiper, Ringed Plover and Avocet. Check the gulls and ducks, which could include Goosander and Shelduck, and watch for Grey Wagtails and Little Egrets on the riverbank. Dunston Staiths is also a favourite haunt for a local Peregrine. Continue along the Tyne, passing saltmarsh and the nearby Metro Centre on your way to the mouth of the Derwent.

3 The footpath along the Derwent takes you up the valley into open countryside and woodland parks, as far as National Trust Gibside, the end point of the Tyne Derwent Way. The Derwent Valley is home to many woodland species, including Kingfisher, Nuthatch, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Treecreeper and Tawny Owl, as well as Dippers – and the Red Kites, which have thrived since their reintroduction began in 2004. At the end of your walk, catch one of the regular buses back into Gateshead.



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PRACTICAL INFO

POSTCODE: NE8 2AU (St Mary's Heritage Centre)
GRID REF: NZ 254 637
MAPS: OS Explorer 316 and 307, OS Landranger 88
PARKING: Various car parks either in Gateshead or at sites along the route – but public transport is the best way to get around
TERRAIN: Good, mostly flat and level paths, but with some slopes
ACCESSIBILITY: Open all year
FACILITIES: Cafés, visitor centres and toilets along the route

INSIDER KNOWLEDGE

Join one of the regular guided bird walks or wildlife recording events to maximise your visit

Tawny Owl

DAVID CHAPMAN/ALAMY

TARGET SPECIES

- Kittiwake
- Red Kite
- Peregrine
- Great Spotted Woodpecker
- Tawny Owl
- Curlew
- Redshank
- Lapwing
- Grey Wagtail
- Dipper
- Little Egret
- Goosander
- Black-tailed Godwit
- Spotted Redshank
- Common Sandpiper
- Ringed Plover
- Avocet
- Nuthatch
- Kingfisher

CO. DURHAM

MAX MILES ON FOOT: 5 **MIN TIME:** 4 HOURS

GREATHAM CREEK

Superb birding in a post-industrial landscape

Teesside is a magical place for birding, given the huge industrial complexes that surround it. The River Tees adds fresh water to the salt water brought in by the tide, giving a good variety of species.

JOHN MILES

Avocet

KEVIN ELSBY/ALAMY

WHERE TO WATCH

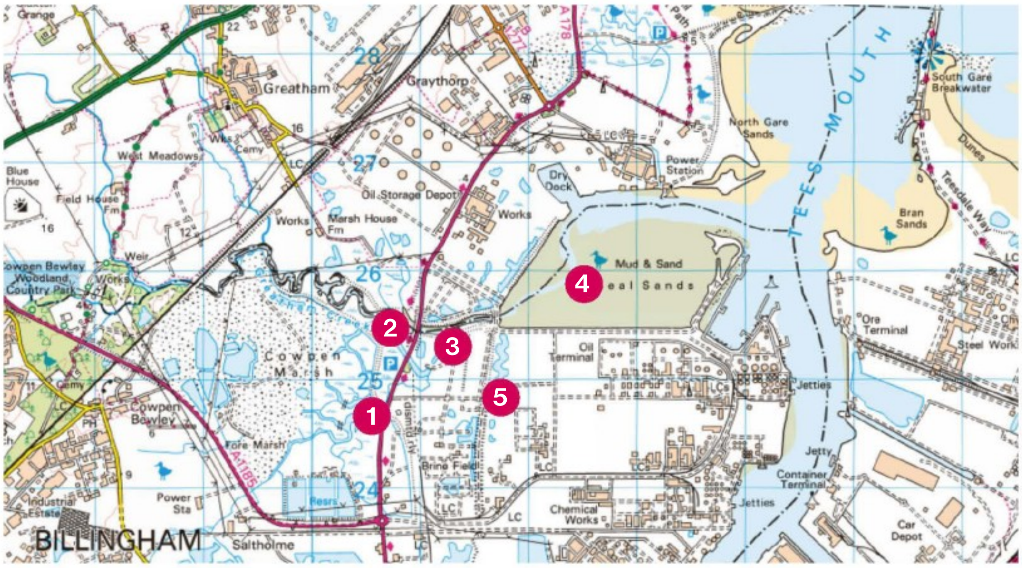
1 Park in the Natural England car park and walk up to the viewpoint screen to scan for waders, egrets and even Spoonbill. Look out for Marsh Harriers now breeding in the area but also Peregrine and Kestrel. Some of the waders like Redshank and Oystercatcher can be here all year round while migrants like Black-tailed Godwit, Curlew Sandpiper and Little Stint can drop in.

2 One of the best experiences with Common Seal can be from the bridge, as the tide can float an animal right under your nose! Again, scan the creek for waders with some great rarities found here such as American Golden Plover, Temminck's Stint and even Wood Sandpiper or Spotted Redshank.

3 Check the pools as you start to move towards the estuary. A large Avocet colony can be found here, and other waders try to keep away from them. Little Egrets roost in the bushes here and, as spring arrives, it is time to look for warblers, with the chance of Sedge Warbler, Whitethroat and even Grasshopper Warbler likely in the area.

4 A hide at Seal Sands can give you the cover you need to watch the tide bringing a wide range of birds. A Brown Booby here was not a bird you would have dreamed of five years ago but now it's possible in the North and Irish Seas. The tide can pull in grebes like Red-necked and Slavonian, while three species of diver have been found. Egyptian Goose and Ruddy Shelduck can be a northern expansion from the big Norfolk population. Waders love the low tide so it's best to give the area a number of goes to get the best of it.

5 There are some excellent finds to be had down here. An expanding reedbed by another hide can give you Bittern, Bearded Tit, Reed Warbler and now ever present Cetti's Warbler. Waders have come in the rare shape of Kentish Plover, Terek Sandpiper and even a Laughing Gull.



Greatham
Graythorp
West Meadows
Blue House
Field House Fm
Works
Marsh House Fm
Oil Storage Depot
Dry Dock
Power Station
North Gare Sands
South Gare Breakwater
TEES MOUTH
Bran Sands
Teesdale Way
Mud & Sand
Seal Sands
Cowpen Bewley Woodland Country Park
Cowpen Marsh
Cowpen Bewley
Brine Field
Oil Terminal
Ore Terminal
Steel Works
Jetties
Jetty
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Car Depot
Industrial Estate
Power Sta
Saltholme
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PRACTICAL INFO

POSTCODE: TS2 1TP
GRID REF: NZ 508 251
MAPS: OS Explorer 306, OS Landranger 93
PARKING: Use the Natural England car park at grid ref NZ 508 251
TERRAIN: Mainly good paths and pavement, beware crossing the A 178
ACCESSIBILITY: All year round
FACILITIES: Everything you need is at Saltholme RSPB

INSIDER KNOWLEDGE

Always check the Swifts as I had a brilliant Alpine Swift here one day

NATURE PICTURE LIBRARY / ALAMY

TARGET SPECIES AUTUMN/WINTER

- Ruff
- Black-tailed Godwit
- Bar-tailed Godwit
- Redshank
- Spotted Redshank
- Black-headed Gull
- Common Gull
- Peregrine
- Marsh Harrier
- Short-eared Owl

SPRING/SUMMER

- Yellow Wagtail
- White Wagtail
- Little Egret
- Osprey
- Hobby
- Whitethroat
- Lesser Whitethroat
- Cuckoo
- Little Ringed Plover
- Avocet

LEICESTERSHIRE

MAX MILES ON FOOT: 4 **MIN TIME:** 3 HOURS

RATBY BURROUGHS

Mixed birding around an Iron Age hillfort

Nuthatch

ALAN WILLIAMS/ALAMY

Situated close to both Thornton Reservoir and Martinshaw Wood, this is an underwatched area that rewards patient coverage. During migration periods, there are good chances of interesting flyover species, but at all times, there's a good variety of birds.

MATT MERRITT

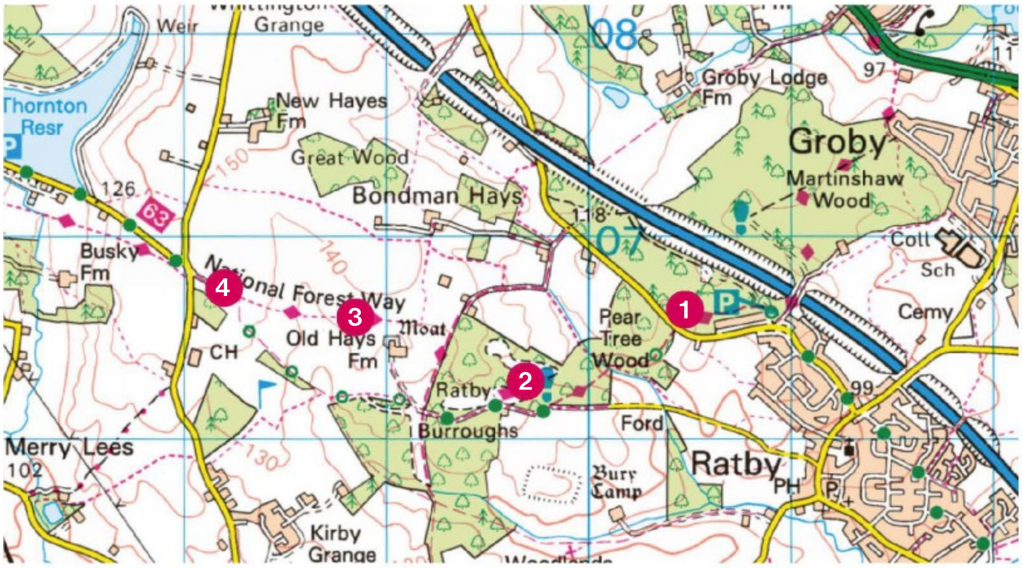
WHERE TO WATCH

1 Take the path from the parking area, crossing Markfield Lane, and enter Pear Tree Wood. Expect Great, Blue, Long-tailed and Coal Tits, plus Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Nuthatch, Treecreeper, Goldcrest and Great Spotted Woodpecker, but check too for something more unusual, such as Brambling in winter. Woodcock is possible in winter.

2 Look across the open ground that was an Iron Age hillfort. In winter, there should be plenty of Redwings, Fieldfares and corvids, but, during migration periods, Wheatear and Ring Ouzel are a possibility. Overhead, look for Buzzard, Kestrel and Sparrowhawk, with Red Kite becoming increasingly common.

3 As the path crosses the fields, expect more winter thrushes, plus the possibility of Lapwing, and Snipe around puddles and flashes.

4 As you approach the road, check the hedgerows for Yellowhammer, plus warblers in spring and summer – Whitethroat, Lesser Whitethroat, Blackcap, Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler are all likely finds around here.



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PRACTICAL INFO

POSTCODE: LE6 0LP (this is the convenience store near the parking area)

GRID REF: SK 509 066 (this is the parking area)

MAPS: OS Explorer 233/245, OS Landranger 129

PARKING: There are parking spaces at SK 509 066, and several more at SK 481 069

TERRAIN: Paths can be muddy in wet weather, and there are some gentle slopes

ACCESSIBILITY: All hours, year-round

FACILITIES: Ratby has plenty of shops and pubs

INSIDER KNOWLEDGE

Combine with a visit to nearby Thornton Reservoir to add some wildfowl to your list

AGAMI PHOTO AGENCY/ALAMY

TARGET SPECIES

WINTER

- Great Spotted Woodpecker
- Lapwing
- Snipe
- Coal Tit
- Long-tailed Tit
- Buzzard
- Kestrel
- Sparrowhawk
- Brambling
- Redwing
- Fieldfare

SPRING/SUMMER

- Blackcap
- Chiffchaff
- Willow Warbler
- Whitethroat
- Lesser Whitethroat
- Hobby
- Red Kite

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

MAX MILES ON FOOT: 3 **MIN TIME:** 2 HOURS

WAKERLEY GREAT WOOD

Explore a bird-rich corner of Rockingham Forest

Coal Tit

ALAN WILLIAMS/ALAMY

This Forestry England site has always been renowned as a good spot for Crossbills, but it also repays patient birders with a wealth of other woodland species, while nearby open areas are also worth checking.

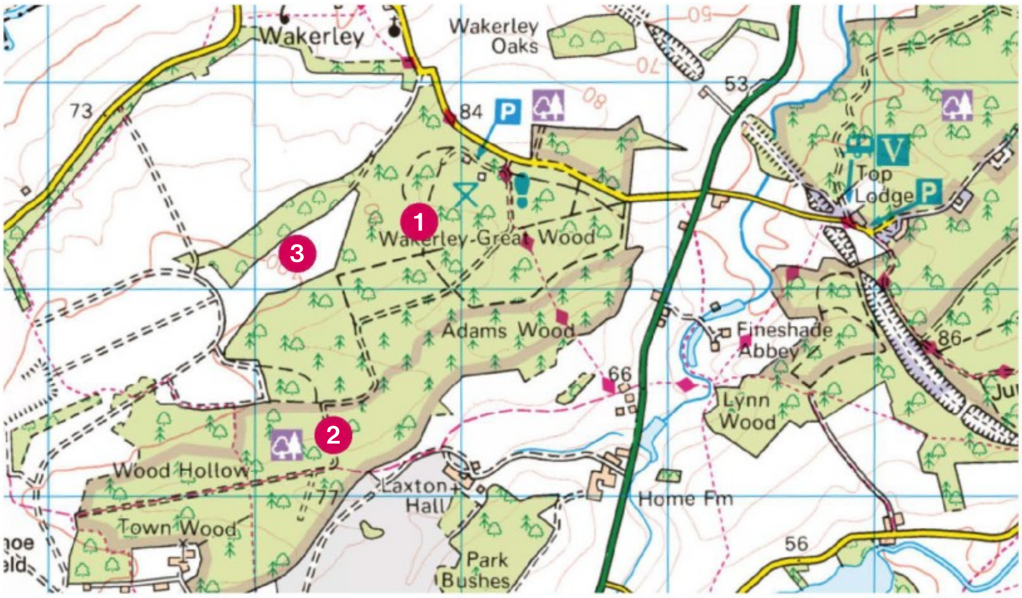
MATT MERRITT

WHERE TO WATCH

1 Walk into the heart of the wood looking for mixed tit flocks (Blue, Great, Coal, Long-tailed, and just possibly, Marsh and Willow), plus Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Treecreeper, Nuthatch and Goldcrest. Bramblings and Hawfinches are always possible in influx years, and a few Woodcock breed here.

2 Further in, check areas of conifers for Crossbills – numbers fluctuate but they are present in at least small numbers most years. Nightingales have occasionally been heard here and at nearby Fineshade Wood (a short hop over the A43).

3 Check open fields for Lapwings and Golden Plovers in winter, plus Fieldfare and Redwing. Red Kite is a very common site here, plus Buzzard, Sparrowhawk, Kestrel and Hobby (in summer), while Goshawk must be increasingly possible. Tawny Owls are present.



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PRACTICAL INFO

POSTCODE: NN17 3BA
GRID REF: SP 961 985
MAPS: OS Explorer 224/234, OS Landranger 141
PARKING: Plenty of free parking at grid ref SP 961 985
TERRAIN: Paths can be muddy, and there are some fairly gentle slopes
ACCESSIBILITY: All hours, year-round,
FACILITIES: None on site, apart from picnic area, but there are garages, shops, and a restaurant at nearby Morcott, and in other villages

INSIDER KNOWLEDGE

Nearby Blatherwycke Lake is a good place to find Mandarin, and occasionally scarce wildfowl such as Smew

TARGET SPECIES

WINTER

- Crossbill
- Blue Tit
- Great Tit
- Coal Tit
- Long-tailed Tit
- Chaffinch
- Greenfinch
- Great Spotted Woodpecker
- Treecreeper
- Nuthatch
- Goldcrest
- Brambling
- Hawfinch
- Fieldfare
- Redwing
- Lapwing
- Golden Plover

SPRING/SUMMER

- Woodcock
- Hobby
- Tawny Owl
- Blackcap
- Willow Warbler
- Chiffchaff
- Buzzard
- Red Kite
- Kestrel
- Sparrowhawk

ESSEX

MAX MILES ON FOOT: 4 **MIN TIME:** 3 HOURS

BRIGHTLINGSEA

A wealth of shorebirds and wildfowl on the Colne estuary

Situated on the famously indented coastline of Essex at the confluences of several rivers, this walk takes in a variety of habitats including coastal scrub, a copse, farmland, small marshes and the extensive intertidal channels, mudflats and sand bars of the River Colne and Brightlingsea Reach. Also of interest are views across the channel towards Mersea Island.

PAUL TRODD

Cormorant

PAUL TRODD

WHERE TO WATCH

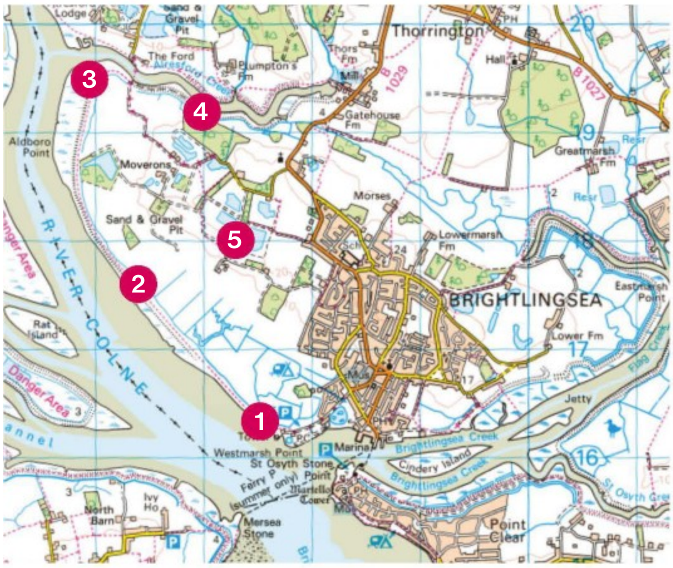
1 A good vantage point to scan the channel from the tower for wintering waders such as Avocet, Curlew, Oystercatcher, Ringed Plover, Dunlin, Sanderling, Black and Bar-tailed Godwits and Redshank. Little Egret, Grey Heron, Turnstone, Rock and Meadow Pipits, Pied and Grey Wagtail haunt the foreshore, where Peregrine and Merlin are active in winter. Flocks of gulls, Cormorants and, in spring, terns loaf on sand bars, including Med Gull, Sandwich, Common and Little Terns. Check the channel for Brent Geese, Wigeon and Shelduck, plus the chance of Red-breasted Merganser, Common Scoter and Black-necked Grebe. Following strong easterlies, seabirds such as Gannet, Kittiwake and auks can occur in the reach.

2 Scan hinterland fields and drainage ditches for raptors such as Kestrel, Buzzard and Marsh Harrier, and in winter Hen Harrier and Red Kite. Short-eared and Barn Owls are often present. Another good spot to scan the Colne or wildfowl, waders and seabirds. Spring migrants such as Little Ringed Plover, Sand Martin and Wheatear often follow the shoreline.

3 The river confluence is a good spot for waders feeding along the creek; typically, Redshank, Turnstone, Oystercatcher, Green Sandpiper and Snipe in winter, and in spring maybe a Little Ringed Plover, Common Sandpiper or Greenshank, plus Grey Heron, Little and Great White Egret. Farmland should deliver flocks of Lapwing, Golden Plover, gulls, corvids, partridges and pigeons, plus Sky Lark, Meadow Pipit and maybe Wheatear. Check field margins for Little Owl, Buzzard, Kestrel, Stonechat, Linnet, Corn and Reed Buntings. A resident Barn Owl is often active at dusk, plus the occasional wintering Short-eared Owl.

4 A deciduous wood supports roving passerine flocks comprising mainly common tits, plus a few Chaffinch, Goldcrest, Treecreeper, Nuthatch and maybe Great Spotted Woodpecker. Jay, Stock Dove, Woodcock, Mistle Thrush, Green Woodpecker, Sparrowhawk and Tawny Owl are also present.

5 The path overlooks a gravel pit good for diving ducks such as Pochard and Tufted, plus Great Crested and Little Grebes, Gadwall, Shover and Teal. Check margins for Grey Heron, Little Egret, Water Rail, Green Sandpiper and Grey Wagtail, while scrub may yield Kingfisher, Cetti's Warbler, Chiffchaff, Blackcap and Reed Bunting



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PRACTICAL INFO

POSTCODE: CO7 0HH
GRID REF: TM 078 162
MAPS: OS Explorer 184, OS Landranger 168
PARKING: Park in the pay and display car park off Promenade Way, Brightlingsea near Bateman's Tower
TERRAIN: Mostly on the level with good footpaths, some surfaced and suitable for wheelchair users near the car park and along the promenade
ACCESSIBILITY: Year-round, on public footpaths and lanes
FACILITIES: The Tower café is adjacent to the car park. Full facilities in Brightlingsea

INSIDER KNOWLEDGE

At low tide, check for Harbour Seals hauled out on sand bars

TARGET SPECIES

WINTER

- Black-necked Grebe
- Great White Egret
- Brent Goose
- Red-breasted Merganser
- Common Scoter
- Hen Harrier
- Peregrine
- Avocet
- Golden Plover
- Grey Plover
- Knot
- Green Sandpiper
- Snipe
- Turnstone
- Mediterranean Gull
- Short-eared Owl
- Grey Wagtail

SPRING/SUMMER

- Marsh Harrier
- Hobby
- Little Ringed Plover
- Common Sandpiper
- Greenshank
- Sandwich Tern
- Cuckoo
- Wheatear
- Yellow Wagtail
- Sedge Warbler

WEST SUSSEX

MAX MILES ON FOOT: 3 **MIN TIME:** 3 HOURS

ARUNDEL PARK

Woodland and wetland birds beside historic Arundel

Green Sandpiper

PAUL TRODD

Situated to the north of Arundel, with its imposing medieval castle, this circular walk combines classic parkland habitat, complete with many ancient trees surrounded by grazing pasture, a steep-sided wooded valley, scrub, mixed woodlands and a large ornamental lake with tree-covered islands. It also takes in a section of the meandering River Arun and adjacent floodplain affording views across the valley to the South Downs.

PAUL TRODD

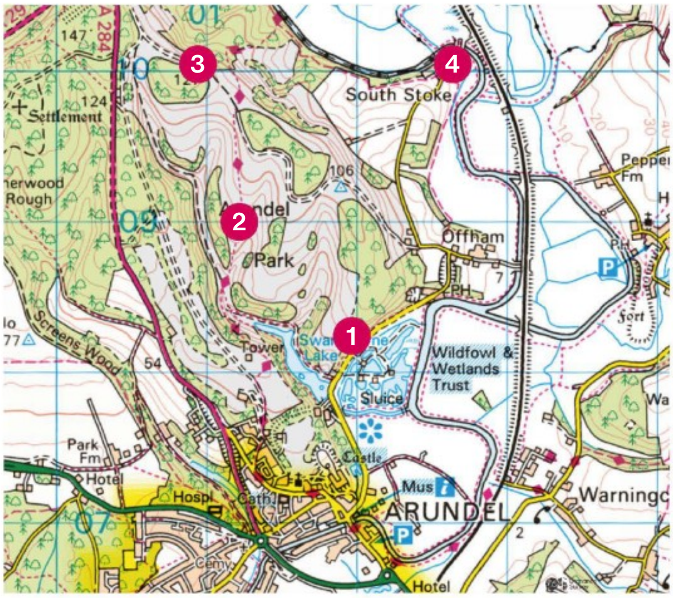
WHERE TO WATCH

1 A wide variety of wildfowl are on offer on the ornamental Swanbourne Lake, some of which are tame, along with Coot and Moorhen. Islands on the lake attract Grey Heron, Cormorant, Mandarin, Teal, Shelduck, Shoveler and Gadwall, with Pochard and Tufted Duck in deeper water. Grey and Pied Wagtails often feed around the margins, as well as the occasional Green Sandpiper early morning, while Jackdaws, Rooks, Starlings, Black-headed and Common Gulls are attracted to the surrounding lawns. In spring, look out for a passing Common Sandpiper, Swallow or Sand Martin.

2 Parkland trees are typical haunts of Mandarin looking for nest sites, along with Stock Dove, Mistle Thrush, Nuthatch, Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers. Grassland can attract wintering Fieldfares and Redwings to join feeding Blackbirds and Song Thrushes, corvids, Woodpigeons and finches. Buzzard, Kestrel and Sparrowhawk are often encountered here. In spring, check for Spotted Flycatcher hawking insects from dead branches and Whitethroat from patches of scrub.

3 Mixed woodland cover is good for passerine flocks that may contain Long-tailed and Marsh Tits among the common species, and the chance of Goldcrest or Firecrest, plus Bullfinch, Treecreeper, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Jay and Stock Dove. As spring approaches, singing Chiffchaffs and Blackcaps are commonplace and a passing Cuckoo may be heard. Sparrowhawk and Red Kite are sometimes seen while Tawny Owl is active at dusk.

4 Where the track skirts the River Arum at South Stoke, search the margins for the likes of Grey Wagtail, Kingfisher, Little Grebe, Green Sandpiper, Snipe and Water Rail. Cetti's Warbler and Reed Bunting are sometimes heard from cover along with a wintering Chiffchaff. Riverside alders can play host to parties of feeding Siskin, Goldfinch and Redpoll. Scan the flood plain for winter wildfowl, Lapwing and Golden Plover moving along the valley and birds of prey such as Peregrine and Marsh Harrier, while late afternoon could yield a hunting Barn or Short-eared Owl. Drainage ditches attract Grey Heron, Little and Great White Egret and spring migrants such as Sedge and Reed Warblers and Yellow Wagtail, plus hirundfines over the fields.



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PRACTICAL INFO

POSTCODE: BN18 9PD

GRID REF: TQ 018 078

MAPS: OS Explorer 121, OS Landranger 175

PARKING: Park along Mill Lane opposite the entrance to Swanbourne Lake

TERRAIN: Footpaths, some unsurfaced, muddy and steep but others surfaced and suitable for wheelchairs on the café side of the lake

ACCESSIBILITY: Year-round

FACILITIES: Toilets and café at Swanbourne Lodge tea rooms

INSIDER KNOWLEDGE

Pay a visit to the adjacent Arundel Wildfowl and Wetland Trust site, ideal for youngsters and with a full range of facilities

TARGET SPECIES

WINTER

- Little Grebe
- Little Egret
- Grey Heron
- Shelduck
- Gadwall
- Pochard
- Mandarin
- Green Sandpiper
- Sparrowhawk
- Kingfisher
- Nuthatch
- Marsh Tit
- Grey Wagtail

SPRING/SUMMER

- Cuckoo
- Hobby
- Blackcap
- Chiffchaff
- Sedge Warbler
- Whitethroat
- Spotted Flycatcher

Grey Wagtail

ARTERRA PICTURE LIBRARY/ALAMY

DORSET

MAX MILES ON FOOT: 3 **MIN TIME:** 3 HOURS

FLEET

Waders and wildfowl in the saline waters of East Fleet

A tight circular walk that includes tidal fleets sandwiched between the stony rampart of Chesil Beach and the south Dorset downs sweeping eastwards towards Portland Harbour. The inland section of the walk winds through arable farmland and sheep-grazed chalk pasture where Hen Harrier and Short-eared Owl often winter. Lookout for Roe Deer and Brown Hare along the way.

PAUL TRODD

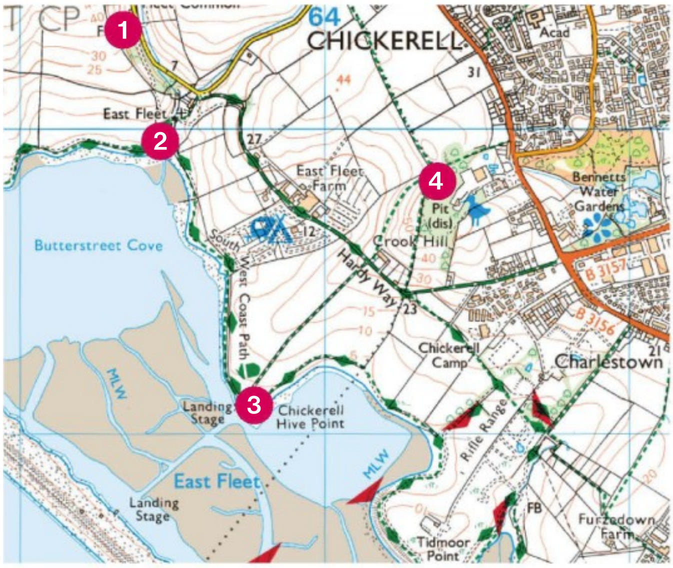
Wigeon

PAUL TRODD

WHERE TO WATCH

1 The churchyard trees and bushes provide suitable habitat for roving flocks of tits, including Goldcrest, Treecreeper, Great Spotted Woodpecker and perhaps a wintering Firecrest, Blackcap or Chiffchaff. Adjacent fields and hedgerows of Fleet Common attract the likes of Stonechat, Redwing, Fieldfare, Goldfinch, Bullfinch, Linnet, Yellowhammer and flocks of gulls, Starlings and corvids, while Buzzard, Sparrowhawk and Kestrel are regularly encountered. Check old trees for Little Owl.

2 The old chapel at the end of the lane is another good spot to scan the trees for warblers and crests. From Butterstreet Cove, flocks of wildfowl should be on the water, particularly Brent Goose, Wigeon and Shelduck along with Great Crested and Little Grebes. Variable numbers of Goldeneye, Red-breasted Merganser, Pintail and Common Scoter occur most winters, along with the odd scarcity such as Red-throated Diver, Eider, Slavonian and Black-necked Grebes. Following gale-force southerlies in Lyme Bay, seabirds such as Great Northern Diver, Shag, Kittiwake, Little Auk, Guillemot and Razorbill may seek sanctuary in East Fleet. Also, a good location to check gull flocks for a possible Glaucous or Iceland Gull.



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3 Check the fleet margins from Cuttcleeves Point for waders– typically Curlew, Oystercatcher, Redshank, Turnstone, Knot, Sanderling, Ringed and Grey Plovers, Dunlin and Bar-tailed and Black-tailed Godwits – plus the occasional wintering Green Sandpiper, Greenshank or Whimbrel. Little Egret and Grey Heron commonly stalk the margins, along with the one or two Great White Egrets and, increasingly, Cattle Egrets feeding among stock in adjacent fields. Large numbers of gulls roost on the fleet, often including Mediterranean, Yellow-legged and Caspian Gulls. The strandline can attract feeding Meadow and Rock Pipits, Pied and Grey Wagtails, plus the odd Black Redstart. Another good spot to encounter a hunting Peregrine or Merlin.

4 Open mixed farmland on the high ground north of the village supports Kestrel, Buzzard, partridges, Stock Dove, corvids, wagtails, buntings, sparrows and finches. Check sheep folds for Lapwing, Golden Plover, Common Gull, Sky Lark, Meadow Pipit, Pied Wagtail, Green Woodpecker, Redwing, Fieldfare and Mistle Thrush. A good spot to scan for any passing birds en route to roost sites, including Raven and Red Kite, while a hunting Barn Owl is likely at dusk.

PRACTICAL INFO

POSTCODE: DT3 4EB
GRID REF: SY 633 805
MAPS: OS Explorer OL15, OS Landranger 194
PARKING: Park considerately along Fleet Road by Holy Trinity Church
TERRAIN: A combination of footpaths and metaled lanes on level and sloping ground
ACCESSIBILITY: Open access on public rights of way throughout

INSIDER KNOWLEDGE

For the best chance of a scarce seabird on the fleets, visit after strong onshore winds

Firecrest

JAMES LOWEN/ALAMY

TARGET SPECIES

WINTER

- Black-necked Grebe
- Great White Egret
- Brent Goose
- Wigeon
- Red-breasted Merganser
- Merlin
- Peregrine
- Black-tailed Godwit
- Green Sandpiper
- Mediterranean Gull
- Kingfisher
- Black Redstart
- Grey Wagtail
- Fircrest
- Redwing and Fieldfare
- Raven

SPRING/SUMMER

- Hobby
- Little Ringed Plover
- Sandwich Tern
- Little Tern
- Cuckoo
- Yellow Wagtail
- Whinchat
- Wheatear
- Grasshopper Warbler

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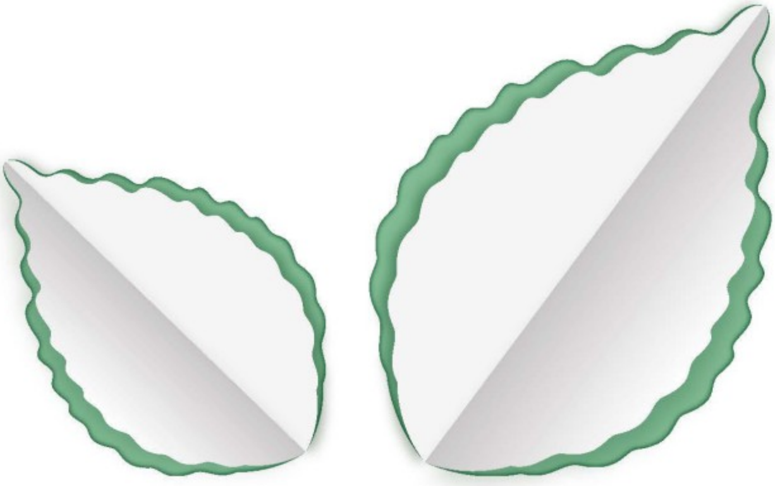

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PAUL R STERRY, NATURE PHOTOGRAPHERS LTD/ALAMY

Chuffed with Choughs

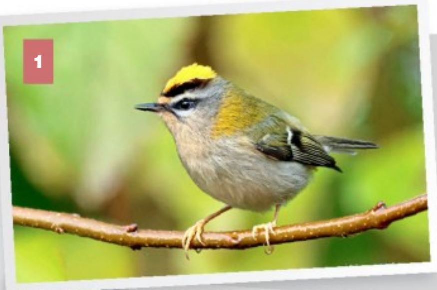
On recent trips in the past several years to west Cornwall, I have regularly seen small groups of Choughs, mainly along the coast west of Mousehole to Cape Cornwall. In mid-October this year, I exceeded all previous occasions by spotting no fewer than 14 Choughs in a noisy group just west of Porthgwarra Cove. I couldn't help wondering if this was becoming more frequent? In any event it is further proof of the success of their reintroduction over the years.

Richard Luttman

Reader Shots

Send your snaps to birdwatching@bauermedia.co.uk to be in with a chance of seeing your photo in print. All images should be high resolution JPEG files.

WE LOVE...
The vibrancy of the Firecrest in the darker months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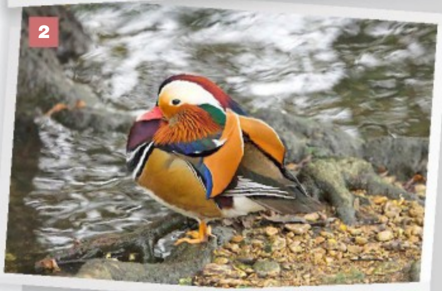
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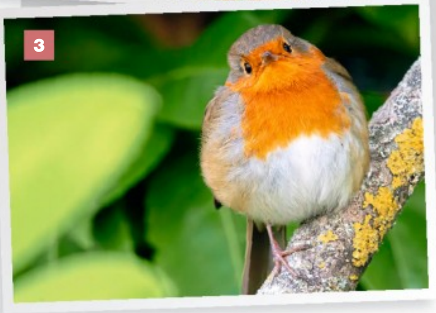
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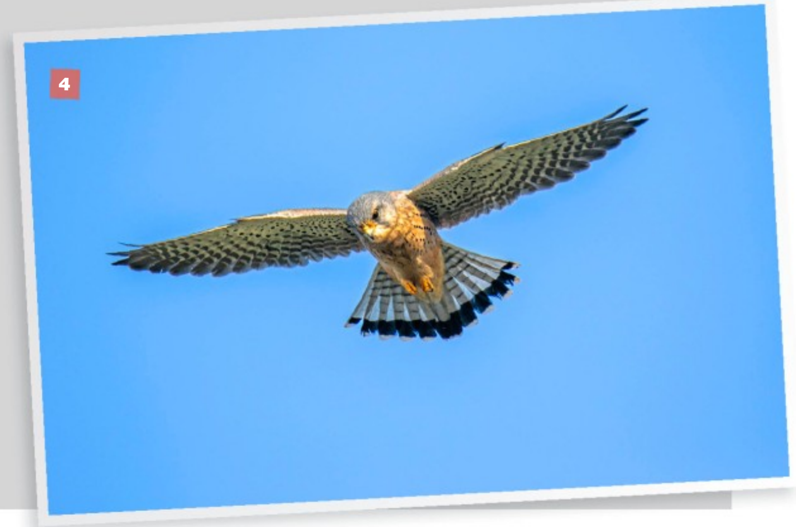
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1 **Firecrest**
Sheila Williams

2 **Mandarin**
Graham Lenton

3 **Robin**
Alicia Sharif

4 **Kestrel**
Martin Yelland

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facebook.com/groups/My200BirdYear

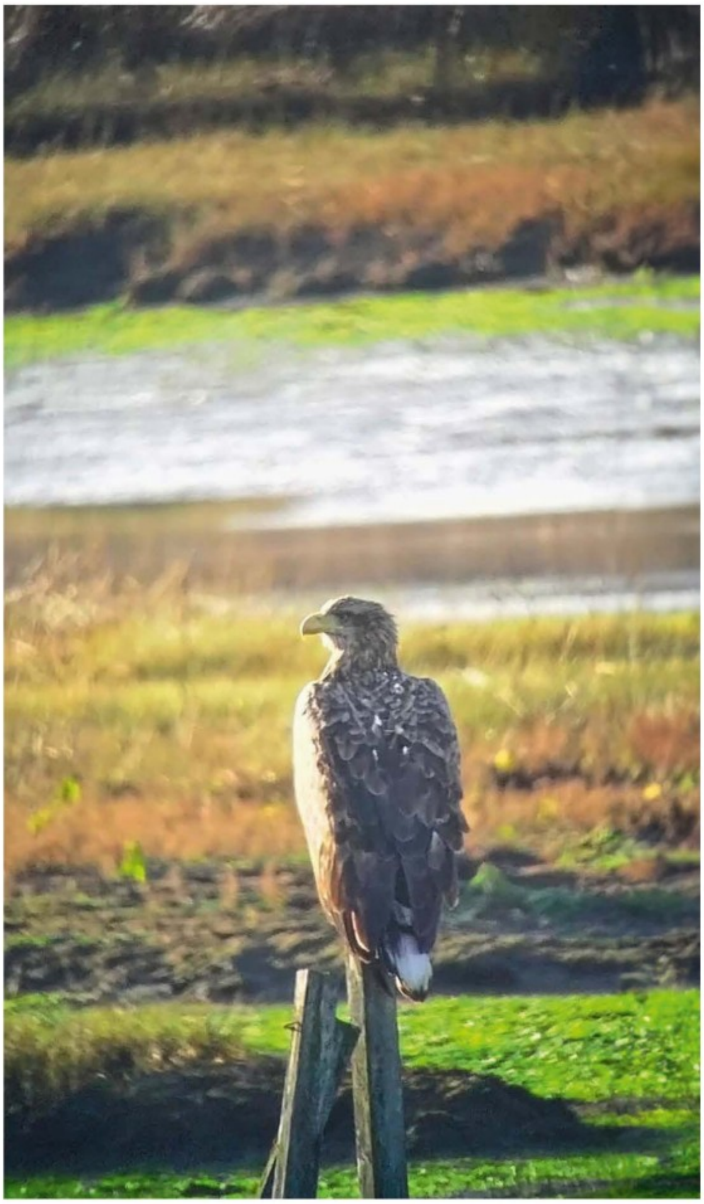
birdwatching.co.uk/my-200-sign-up/

Bearded Tits by Paul Kaiser

Black Redstart by Lisa Lark

Cranes by Francesca House

Buzzard and Short-eared Owl by Mitch Harris



CHRIS WEEDON

Wader disturbance

I had a gigantic moment of joy on my way home to Somerset from a work site visit, on Tuesday (29 November). I had just enough time to make a trip to the edge of Poole Harbour, where I was hurriedly scoping a bunch of small waders. My annoyance at their being sent up (I assumed by a dog-walker) turned to shock when I realised that the disturbance was being caused by a low flying White-tailed Eagle! It was a lifer for me, first seen when entering my scope's field of view. The eagle briefly swept around a bit, before taking to an exposed perch (see photo, above). Apparently, there's a pair (not yet breeding) in the harbour area, but this was a visiting sub-adult. This was the best eagle view I've ever had in Britain!

Chris Weedon

Explanations, please

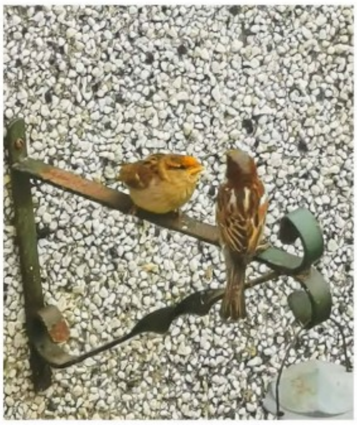
I really enjoy reading and learning from your magazine. As a relative newcomer to birds I would really appreciate extra information as to what distinguishes a rarer bird from the type more often seen. For example, the Hudsonian Godwit in October's magazine: what are its distinguishing features? More explanation throughout the magazine when appropriate would really help my learning!

Janet Jackson

Your Questions

Send all your birding questions to birdwatching@bauermedia.co.uk and our experts will give you the answers

Sparrow problem


ISOBEL HIOM

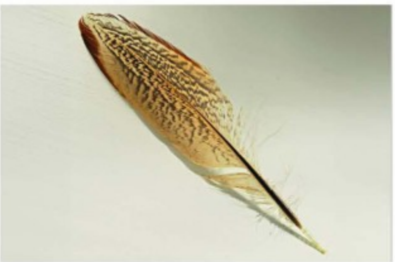
Q **Sorry for the photo quality, I took this on my phone through a window, as the birds were on my neighbour's bird feeder. Adult sparrows were feeding this juvenile that was more plump than the adults and it had a strange orange patch of feathers on its head. They were definitely feathers and not something stuck on its head. What species is this juvenile?**
Isobel Hiom

A The easiest way to identify most juvenile birds is to check out their parents. This bird is being fed by House Sparrows, so that is what it probably is. It can obviously feed itself as well, though, as evidenced by the yellow/orange on the forehead, which appears to be 'stained' by some kind of pollen from a flower, which it had poked its head in.

Feather query

Q **I recently found this feather on the edge of a wood at Marston Vale countryside park in Bedfordshire and wonder if you can identify it for me, please.**
Ann Jarvis

A Your feather, Ann, appears to be that of a Pheasant. Certain feather types are found more frequently than others. Woodpigeons' and Magpies' come to mind. But of the patterned black and golden buff type, the most frequently found are those of Pheasants, which as you can imagine, are highly variable. But this type is typical of female Pheasant feathers.


ANN JARVIS

Odd b/w thrush

Q **We have a bit of a puzzler here and would appreciate an expert's opinion. In this photo you will just about make out a black-and-white bird – mainly black but with white chest speckled with black blotches and white stripes on the wing-bars. It was snapped by a friend on her phone when it flew in front of her and landed in the tree in late October. Having done a bit of searching on the internet, it seems her bird most closely resembles an Ashy Thrush, but given that this bird was spotted in Wadhurst, East Sussex, maybe it is a Siberian Thrush?**

JUDITH GOVER

However, her bird is more black than any photos I have found of Siberian Thrush. We should be very grateful for your opinion, but realise the image is poor quality.
Judith Gover

A As far as we can tell from the photos, your black-and-white thrush is a Blackbird, albeit one with anomalous plumage, of course. Blackbirds are one of the birds in which unusual plumage variations, especially including patches of white feathering, are most frequently seen. White feathering (as is stated in the feature on page 32) is caused by an absence of pigment (especially melanin), while black feathering is caused by a high amount of melanin. We are not geneticists, but perhaps there is the equivalent of a 'switch' in the genes which when 'on' produces black feathers and when 'off' white, although this is surely simplistic. It may also be that white feathers in Blackbirds are more obvious as they contrast so strongly with the usual black feathers (of males). Unusual genetic mutations can throw up all sorts of weird patterns (mostly asymmetrical), and your Blackbird seems to be quite an extreme form of this.

Bird Watching

Bird Watching
FEB ISSUE
ON SALE
JAN 23

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DOMINIC COUZENS ON THE...

Crane

They're bold, they're brassy, and they're back. **Dominic Couzens** looks at the resurgence of the Crane in the UK

ROBIN CHITTENDEN/ALAMY

These are some of the highest fliers in the world

NATURE PICTURE LIBRARY/ALAMY

Their bugling call is unforgettable

NATURE PICTURE LIBRARY/ALAMY

You could have a good argument about what is the loudest British bird. Groups of piping Oystercatchers are so noisy that you cannot make yourself heard above them when in full flow. Personally, I've been almost knocked over by a very close burst from a Cetti's Warbler. The boom of the Bittern, quite a gentle sound but deep and carried by long wavelengths, can touch an ear five kilometres away. But how about the wonderful blasts of Cranes, which have been described both as trumpeting and bugling? They are the nearest bird sounds to a brass instrument, a sort of Fanfare for the Common Crane.

They should, perhaps, be logically the loudest calls of their kind, because Cranes have a physiological quirk that helps them amplify their sounds. The windpipe (or trachea) is greatly elongated, to three or four times the length that would be expected for a bird of this size. Amazingly, the trachea coils around on its way to the lungs and even fuses with the sternum. The trachea coils vibrate against the sternum and the result is their 'public address system' call, loud and clear. Cranes announce their presence, in every possible sense.

Cranes are the tallest British birds, too, standing up to 1.3m high. When you see a Crane in a book, you sometimes imagine that it might resemble a heron – and then you see one in the wild and you realise there is no comparison. It towers over every heron, and with the bushy feathers at the tail end, it faintly resembles an Ostrich. It also flies in a completely different way to a heron; the wingbeats are slow and measured, with a slightly faster upstroke than downstroke, and diagnostically, the neck is extended, rather than retracted, in flight. Cranes give the impression that they practised flying when they were young and as a result only ever fly perfectly. In large groups, they form fantastic V-formations. They are able to soar on thermals, and there are some reports (Wikipedia) that they have been recorded flying at 10,000m above ground (the second highest altitude recorded for a bird, the highest being a vulture, at 11,300m.)

If you weren't already aware, you should be getting the picture of a dramatic, exciting bird, and even on the ground, the Crane still has the capacity to thrill and excite. One of its most famous pieces of behaviour, revered in cultures around the world where these birds occur, is dancing. It is similar in form to human dancing, the birds bowing and lifting their heads and leaping into the air, often in unison, although the birds also open their wings for balance. They will even perform pirouette-like twists. Mostly, but not strictly, seen among first year birds, it is used in courtship – paired adults

Crane in flight is a picture of serenity

Many of the UK's Cranes remain here in winter

PREMIUM STOCK PHOTOGRAPHY GMBH/ALAMY

swap for a bowing display instead. Nonetheless, it is exuberant and lively and has conferred on Cranes a reputation for joie de vivre and eternal youth. Although their lifespan is not exceptional in the wild (five to seven years, on average), they can live much longer, and the migrations of Cranes have long been associated with the ancient changing of seasons.

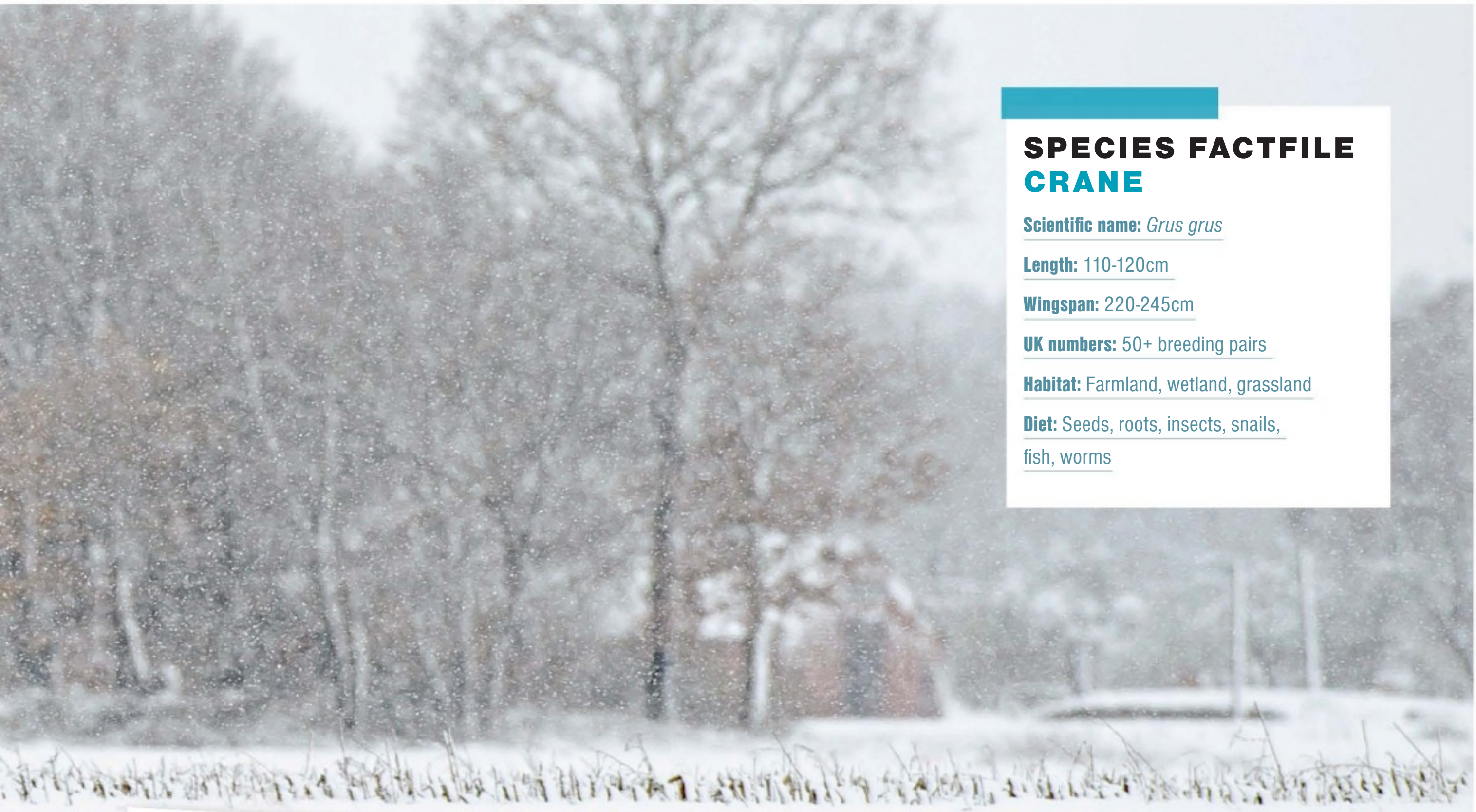
The cultural association with longevity happens to have a curious scientific parallel. The Sandhill Crane, an American relative of our Crane, has one of the most ancient fossil records of any bird. There are definite remains of birds from 2.5 million years ago, whereas most modern bird species arose from about 1.8 million years ago. More speculatively, there are suggestions that this very same bird could have evolved more than 10 million years ago.

The sense of stability extends to the birds' breeding behaviour. Once formed, pairs usually stay together for life, and this includes migrating and wintering as a couple (and as a family). In earlier years, pairs do divorce, especially if their first breeding attempts end in failure, but once that hurdle has been reached, they rarely separate. Throughout the breeding season, they keep the fires burning with regular bouts of 'Unison Calls', in which males and females duet, the male starting with a noisy trumpet and the female following with a lower pitched call – apparently these Unison Calls are individually identifiable. As they call, they hold their heads up and lower them slowly – once again, it's stirring stuff.

> “CRANES WERE HISTORICALLY BRITISH BIRDS THAT BECAME EXTINCT IN THE 16TH CENTURY AS A RESULT OF HABITAT LOSS AND HUNTING (THEY WERE CONSIDERED GOOD EATING). AFTER A VERY LONG ABSENCE, WILD BIRDS FINALLY RETURNED IN 1979 AND A SMALL POPULATION BUILT UP IN THE NORFOLK BROADS”

Prior to breeding, Cranes often do something very unusual and decidedly odd – they 'paint' their plumage a different colour. This, essentially, means scrabbling around in the mud or detritus until their plumage is stained. The idea, presumably, is to make them far more cryptic when incubating or attending the nest, but the question then arises – why don't they just moult into a different plumage? Or, if this is an important survival strategy, why aren't they more cryptic in the first place?

Cranes differ extravagantly from most other long legged wading birds by completely eschewing the idea of colonies and, indeed, even where Cranes are common, pairs are always widely spaced. They nest on the ground, in bogs and marshes, often by shallow water. The birds



SPECIES FACTFILE
CRANE

Scientific name: *Grus grus*

Length: 110-120cm

Wingspan: 220-245cm

UK numbers: 50+ breeding pairs

Habitat: Farmland, wetland, grassland

Diet: Seeds, roots, insects, snails, fish, worms

Number of breeding pairs is now almost in three figures

ARTERRA PICTURE LIBRARY/ALAMY

They favour grassland close to water

OLIVER SMART/ALAMY

build up a pile of vegetation for the nest and, as a result, it often has a 'moat' around it. The female usually lays two eggs but begins incubation as soon as she has laid the first. As a result, one chick is invariably older than the other, and will outcompete its sibling, often fatally when food is short. That doesn't make Cranes bad parents; indeed, they are extremely bold and fearless when threatened by predators. There are records of them impaling their bills into the skulls of carnivorous mammals, and they will also attack large birds of prey. Their sheer size, powerful bill and capacity to kick seems to work well in defence.

Cranes, unlike many herons, are omnivorous, taking a great deal of vegetable material as well as worms, snails and insects. They sometimes gulp down fish, but don't go to the trouble of waiting beside still water and striking, as herons do. Instead, Cranes just wander slowly and eat what they unearth, by picking and probing. In many areas, especially in the winter, they are known for taking such items as waste corn, potatoes, acorns (especially from Cork Oaks in Spain) and rice.

In winter, Cranes follow a regular diurnal regime, which is similar to that of geese. They feed in relatively dry areas by day, and then retreat to shallow water to roost at night. Where Cranes are common, there can be mass movements at dawn and dusk, which rival goose flocks for spectacle and noise. With their extra vocal power, their departures and arrivals can be fantastic to witness.

Cranes were historically British birds that became extinct in the 16th Century as a result of habitat loss and hunting (they were considered good eating). After a very long absence, wild birds finally returned in 1979, and a small population built up in the Norfolk Broads. Over time numbers have increased, albeit slowly, and extra help has been provided by captive breeding programmes. The Crane is now, happily, on the up. In 2023, there were 80 breeding pairs, and the British population is about 250 birds, many of which remain in winter.

The sheer lack of habitat suggest that Cranes will never be common birds in the UK, but things have markedly improved. This bird is a success story. In fact, shout it loud. There should be a fanfare. BW

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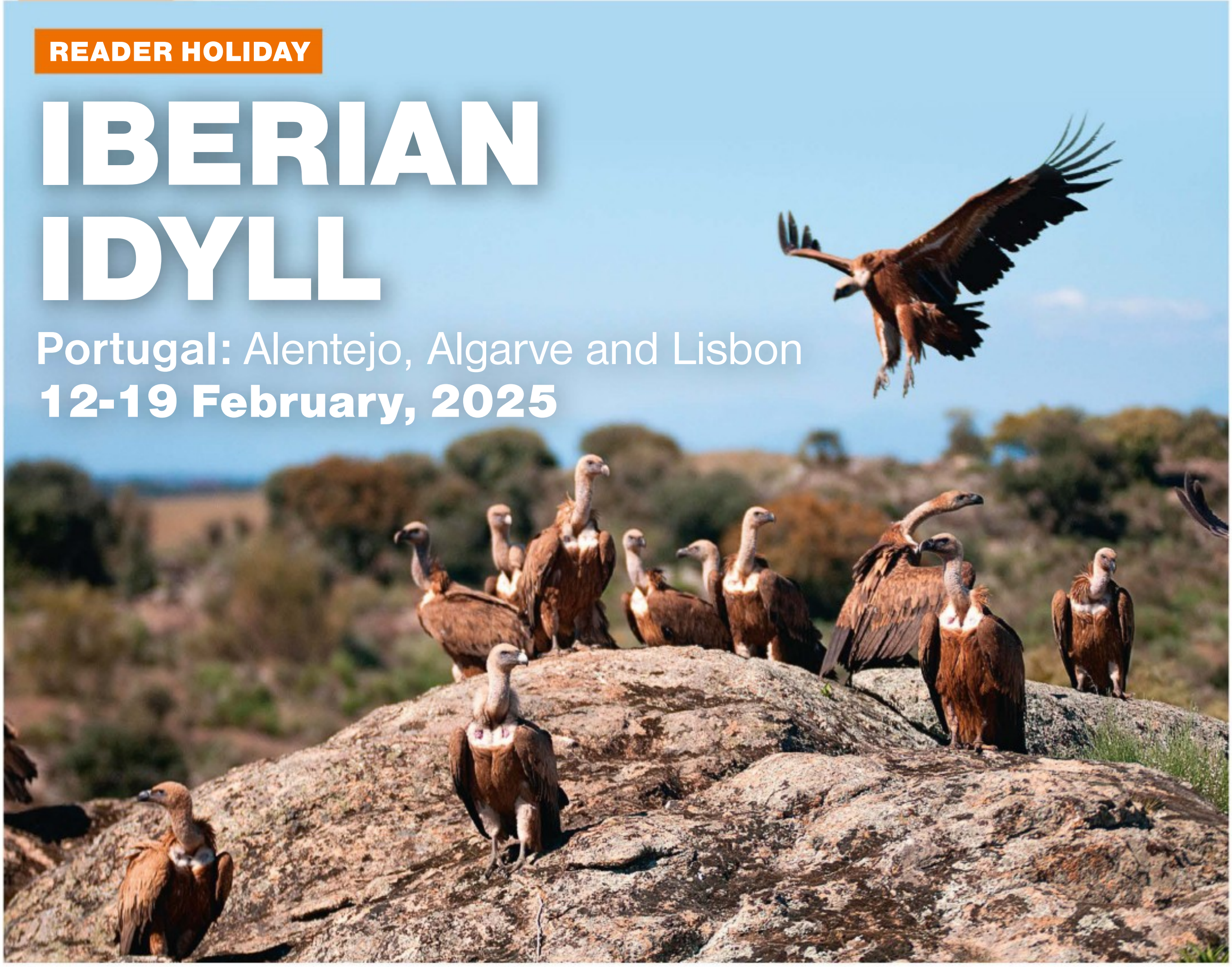
Portugal: Alentejo, Algarve and Lisbon

12-19 February, 2025



JAH/ALAMY

In a recent issue of *Bird Watching*, we looked at the birding riches of the Algarve, in southern Portugal. It's particularly good for waders, wetland birds and seawatching. But just to the north is the Alentejo, where steppe-like habitat plays host to species such as Great and Little Bustard, Black-bellied Sandgrouse, Roller, Iberian Grey Shrike and Woodchat Shrike. There are plenty of raptors, too, with Iberian Imperial Eagle, Golden Eagle and Bonelli's Eagle, plus Black and Griffon Vulture.

Around the beautiful, historic town of Mertola, overlooking the gorge of the Guadiana River, are species such as Blue Rock Thrush and Golden Oriole, plus a wealth of warblers, as well as possible Iberian Lynx.

Next year sees the first ever Mertola Bird and Wildlife Festival, from 19-23 February, and just ahead of it we'll be running a fully guided readers' holiday, led by renowned Portuguese birding guide Joao Jara and Bird Watching editor Matt Merritt, from 12-19 February, looking for the best of Portuguese birds at this exciting time of year. As well as exploring the Alentejo and the area around Mertola, there'll be a chance to birdwatch around Lisbon and the Tagus Estuary, with its many weltland sites, and on the Algarve.

Please note that flights are extra to the price, but inexpensive flights to Lisbon are available from many UK airports.

Guests will be met at Lisbon airport on 12 February, and dropped back there on the 19th. BW

Information

12-19 February 2025

● **Group size:** 10

● **Price:** €1,900 per participant, single supplement €320.

● **Price includes:** Guide fees, transfers from/to airport/hotel, ground transport (in air-conditioned vehicles), accommodation (including breakfast), meals (lunches in local cafés and dinners in local restaurants, including quality wine at dinner), bottled water throughout, free use of quality binoculars and telescopes and field guides, bird list, entrance fees to private or protected areas, a contribution of €40 to our Conservation Project in the Guadiana Valley Natural Park (Portugal), participant's accident insurance and VAT.

● **Not included:** Flights; items of a personal nature.

To book

Please email booking@birds.pt, including 'Bird Watching Magazine Spring Tour' in the subject line.

Goldman's Warbler

ALL CANADA PHOTOS/ALAMY

BLICKWINKEL/ALAMY

Highland highlights

Most birders visiting Central America head for Costa Rica or Panama. But, as **Stephen Moss** discovered, in spring, neighbouring Guatemala holds regional highland and lowland endemics rubbing shoulders with migrant songbirds…

I'm standing on a plateau, 11,000 feet above sea level, and holding a cup of hot, dark black coffee. I'm also feeling glad that I decided to wear virtually every item of clothing I have. Fortunately, the rising sun soon warms me up, and brings out one of the most beautiful and enigmatic members of the American wood warbler family.

At first sight, Goldman's Warbler resembles what our expert guide Roland calls a 'yellow-rumped'. That's birders' shorthand for Myrtle and Audubon's Warblers, which are respectively found throughout the eastern and western halves of North America. But as this male Goldman's hops up onto a bush just a few yards in front of us, and begins to sing, we can all appreciate the difference.

This may be a yellow-rumped, but it looks as if it has spent long hours in the gym, and appears larger and much bulkier than its more slender, delicate cousins. It also has a contrasting yellow and black plumage and a richer, deeper and slower song. These differences, together with its tiny world range in the highlands of southern Mexico and northern Guatemala, has finally persuaded the ornithological powers-that-be to elevate Goldman's Warbler to full species status.

Goldman's was just one of 30 different warbler species we encountered on this memorable early April trip. Many of these breed in the USA and Canada, and were just passing through Guatemala on their way north, while others are resident here.

In the highlands we enjoyed frequent views of Townsend's Warbler, and caught up with the much rarer Hermit, MacGillivray's and Grace's Warblers, all of which were heading to the western USA.

Tjhe delightful Pink-headed Warbler is present in large numbers

Ornate Hawk-eagle

OCTAVIO CAMPOS SALLES/ALAMY

Townsend's Warbler

ALL CANADA PHOTOS/ALAMY

Down in the lowlands we could hardly move for handsome black, grey and yellow Magnolia Warblers, along with trickier species such as the skulking Kentucky Warbler, which finally revealed itself as it crawled around the densely vegetated forest floor.

Best of all, though, were the regional endemics; species, like Goldman's, confined to the highlands of southern Mexico and northern Guatemala. Our main target was the enigmatic Pink-headed Warbler: a stunningly colourful creature with a crimson body and silvery-pink head. To our delight, this turned out to be one of the commonest species here, giving consistently excellent views as it foraged for food in the trees and bushes along the roadside.

Warblers weren't the only highlight of our 10-day stay in the highlands. On early morning outings we caught up with some of the region's rarest and most sought after birds. These included Ornate Hawk-eagle, Blue-and-white Mockingbird, Highland, Crested and Horned Guans – this almost mythical species scoped across a valley, while we were being serenaded by Pink-headed Warblers.

We also saw Mottled, Black-and-white and Fulvous Owls, and both Ferruginous and Guatemalan Pygmy Owls (the latter a recent split), along with almost 40 species of tyrant-flycatchers, and a host of colourful trogons, motmots, toucans, tanagers and hummingbirds.

Forest birding can be hard work, but thanks to Roland's sharp eyes and forensic identification skills – helped by our superb local guides – we got excellent views of some really tricky species, including a young male Collared Forest-falcon, Ruddy Foliage-gleaner, and a gorgeous pair of Long-tailed Manakins. A real highlight for me (having missed this species several times before in Central America) was an Orange-billed Nightingale-thrush, which was so cooperative I even managed to film a video clip of the male singing.

> “WE CAUGHT UP WITH RARE AND SOUGHT AFTER BIRDS, LIKE ORNATE HAWK-EAGLE”

We also traversed Lake Atitlán, a vast and very deep inland waterbody formed by the explosion of a volcano several million years ago. This brought mixed feelings: I was pleased to visit the lake itself, but very sad that we were more than 30 years too late to see the region's only endemic waterbird, the Atitlán Grebe, which was declared extinct in 1990. Now that would have been a prize.

No visit to Guatemala is complete without an encounter with the Resplendent Quetzal. This is the country's national bird, the name of its currency, and the 'feathered serpent' of Mayan mythology. We staked out a nest-site, and after a long wait the male returned and changed

Guatemalan Pygmy Owl

BLICKWINKEL/ALAMY

Black-and-white Owl

IAN BUTLER PHOTOGRAPHY/ALAMY

places with the incubating female – his impossibly long tail-feathers remaining outside the nest-hole throughout. Roland pointed out that the Guatemalan race has an even longer tail than the one I saw in Costa Rica, and might soon be split as a separate species.

For some of the participants, the tour ended with those incredible views of Goldman's Warbler – together with the elusive Olive Warbler, and both ground and flight views of another very rare and sought-after highland species, the Ocellated Quail.

But, for the rest of us, another four days beckoned, in a very different habitat: the lowlands of Petén on the Yucatan Peninsula, based around the ancient pyramids at Tikal. We might almost have been in a different country: exchanging cool and fresh weather conditions for hot and humid ones, along with a whole new suite of birds.

We began in the fields of the lowland savanna, where fortunately a layer of cloud kept the temperature down to a bearable mid-20s Celsius (rather than the low 40s which is had been just a week earlier), which allowed us to bird all morning. Specialities here included Botteri's, Olive and Green-backed Sparrows, Couch's Kingbird (identical to its widespread Tropical cousin, apart from the distinctive song), and Black Catbird, showing along a noisy highway, while we also saw Black Yucatan Howler Monkeys in the nearby forest.

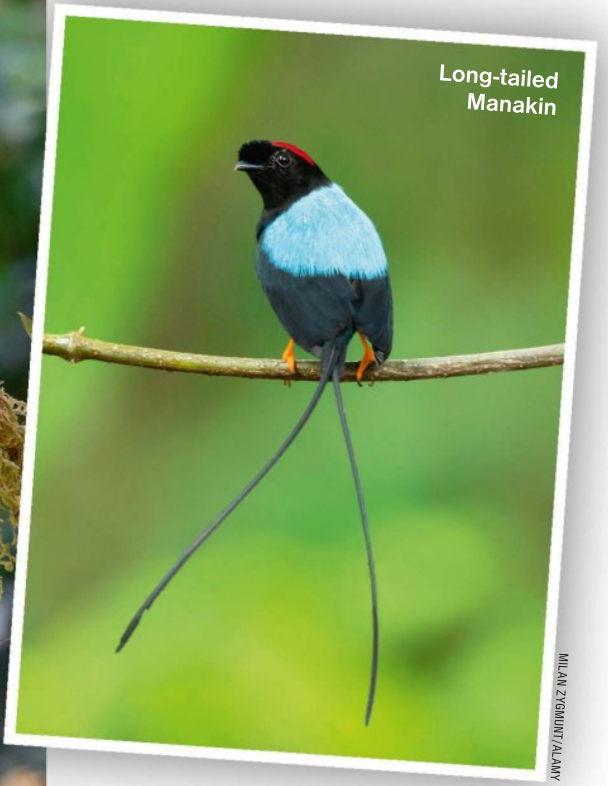
That afternoon we enjoyed a different – and much more relaxed – birding experience, as we took a boat out onto the huge Lake Petén Itza. For the next few hours, new birds just kept on coming: lots of different New World herons, Ringed and Belted Kingfishers, and the curious, long-necked Anhinga (or American Darter), ➤

Recommended reading

- **Birds Of Central America, by Andrew C. Vallely and Dale Dyer (Princeton Field Guides) https://press.princeton.edu/books/hardcover/978069113801an5/birds-of-central-america**
- **Peterson Field Guide to Birds of Northern Central America, by Jesse Fagan and Oliver Komar (Mariner Books) https://www.nhbs.com/peterson-field-guide-to-birds-of-northern-central-america-book**
- **Bird of Life, Bird of Death, by Jonathan Evan Maslow – available second-hand on www.abebooks.co.uk – a brilliant account of birding in Guatemala at a more difficult time, published in the 1980s.**

Resplendent Quetzal: the national bird of Guatemala

FRANCESCO PUNTIROLI/ALAMY



Long-tailed Manakin

MILAN ZYGMUNT/ALAMY

along with jacanas, gallinules, and various waders, including elegant Black-necked Stilts.

We had three key species to search for, all of which we could easily have missed. The first and most difficult, a skulking Yellow-breasted Crake, finally emerged from the reeds at the side of the lake after a long wait; the second, Pinnated Bittern, was far more cooperative, giving us great views of birds perched by the lakeside and in fight. We then caught sight of our third and final target, Aplomado Falcon, when a pair rose up to mob a passing Great Blue Heron as it flew over their nest-site.

Orange-billed Nightingale-thrush

JOE AUSTIN PHOTOGRAPHY/ALAMY

The next few days saw us back in the forest – but again, a very different set of birds from the highland cloud forests of the first part of the tour. We continued to enjoy some real surprises, including a stunning Agami Heron, and more predictable ones, such as the Ocellated Turkey (the smaller cousin of the Wild Turkey, the ancestor of our familiar domesticated bird), one of which greeted us in the car park on our arrival at Jungle Lodge.

Our final two days in Guatemala were spent exploring the historical site of Tikal – truly the experience of a lifetime, and not just because of the birds. On our first morning, we left the lodge before dawn to climb the 141 steps of one of the main pyramids, constructed by the Mayans between one and two millennia ago.

As dawn broke, from our spectacular viewpoint above the forest canopy we enjoyed views of Black-headed Trogon, a trio of Amazon parrots – Mealy, Red-lored and White-fronted – Montezuma Oropendola (named after the king of the rival Aztec civilisation), and a pair of Orange-breasted Falcons, nesting on the adjacent temple.

Afterwards we went on various walks through the forest, where again we managed to get good views of some very hard-to-see birds: Scaly-throated Leaftosser (surely a candidate for the world's most bizarre bird name), Stub-tailed Spadebill (another equally weird one), along with three species of woodcreepers; and best of all, a mating pair of Barred Forest-falcons – one of the most mysterious of all the world's raptors.

Then to our final day – and a chance to catch up with a few species we hadn't yet seen, as well as better views of those we had. For me, the highlight was an incredibly close encounter with a group of Ocellated Turkeys, which since that first sighting in the car park had proved elusive. Just in time, we came across a splendidly cooperative male, performing his complex and bizarre courtship display to the watching females.

What a way to end a truly memorable visit to this captivating, friendly and scenically varied country. BW

With thanks to...

- **Stephen Moss travelled to Guatemala with Wings Birding Tours www.wingsbirds.com**
- **Huge thanks to outstanding tour leader Roland Rumm, tour manager Stephanie Schaefer, and expert local guides: Everilda Buchan, Alfredo Tol, Lisandro de Leon, Vinicio Bravo, Esteban Matias, Cecilia Mathias, Gumercindo García, and Byron Melgar.**

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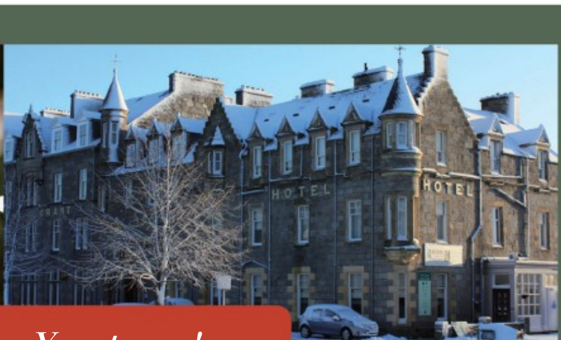

Merry Christmas and a very Happy New Year to you!

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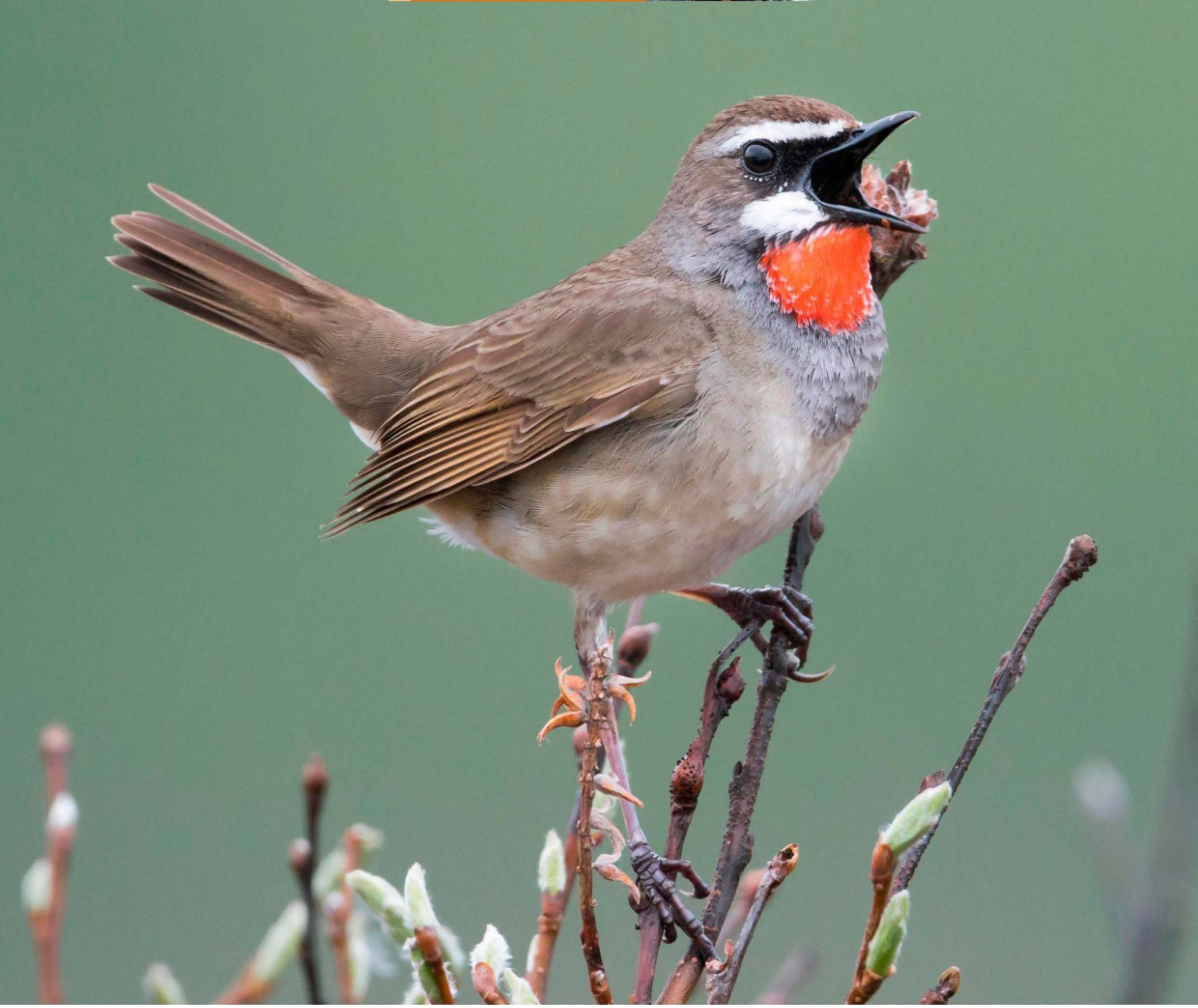


Siberian Rubythroat

This migratory mega symbolises hope and new beginnings. What better species for **David Lindo** to kick his new year off with?

If there is one bird that most hardcore British birders would want to happen across, it would have to be the mystical Siberian Rubythroat, even if it was just once in our lives. We hold this romantic vision of finding this and other hallowed 'Sibes' in a random bush along a coastal Yorkshire path, or more usually, in some windswept place on Shetland. It is the stuff of ornithological dreams; a twitcher's ultimate fantasy, if you will. Incidentally, Sibes is the collective name for any passerine that originates from what we often imagine as a desolate frosty part of the world – Siberia. Although breeding in southern and central Siberia, this delightful mega also emanates from central to eastern Asia, which is not really Siberia, as that region is technically

Siberian Rubythroats are usually incredibly well hidden, but males will occasionally sing in full view on top of a small tree or bush.

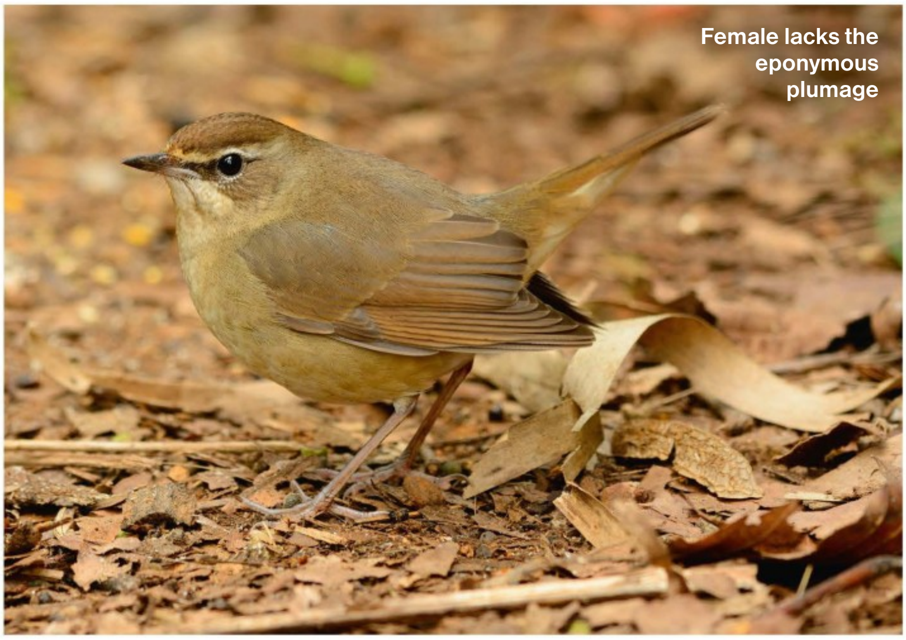
RALPH MARTIN, BIA, MINDEN PICTURES/ALAMY

FACT FILE

Siberian Rubythroat

Calliope calliope

- Size:**14.5-16cm**
- Relatives: **Bluethroat, the nightingales**
- Conservation status: **Least concern**
- UK status: **Mega rarity**
- Pub quiz fact: **The Siberian Rubythroat is sometimes targeted by the illegal wild bird trade, hunted and trapped for food in south-east Asia.**



Female lacks the eponymous plumage

KOMKRIT TONUSIN/ALAMY

referred to as northern Asia. It seems clear to me that someone will have to look at renaming this bird. But they could have trouble coming up with a sexier name than Siberian Rubythroat!

The Siberian Rubythroat was originally described in 1776 by Peter Simon Pallas; he of Pallas's Warbler, Sandgrouse, Reed Bunting, Rosefinch and Grasshopper Warbler fame, to name just a few of the species named in his honour. Slightly larger than a Robin, with a jizz more in keeping with a Nightingale, this rubythroat is a migratory insectivore that usually spends its winters in south-east Asia and the Philippines, where it is noted that they are most active at twilight.

In its native lands it is not an uncommon bird, being found across a vast area. Its current population levels appear to be quite stable. It seems as though their resilience to changes wrought upon their habitat, usually brought on by the hand of man, has certainly helped them.

> “THIS MIGRATORY INSECTIVORE WINTERS IN SOUTH-EAST ASIA AND THE PHILIPPINES”

Speaking of Nightingales, rubythroats were once included in the aforementioned songster's family genus, *Luscinia*. They have now been put into their own separate genus, *Calliope*, alongside four other rubythroat species. Indeed, rubythroats and their ilk used to be considered as part of the thrush family, but modern thinking now places them within the Old World flycatcher family. This is a concept that I struggle with. Coming from the old school of birding, I find it hard to think of birds like Robins, our trusty old Wheatear and, of course, rubythroats themselves as being flycatchers. Surely flycatchers spend all day jumping out of trees chasing after flies?

Siberian Rubythroats are revered by certain Asian cultures within their wide range and can symbolise hope and new beginnings. As intimated earlier, these birds are also idolised outside of their normal range. They set hearts to race and bank accounts to deplete when discovered in the UK.

The first ever record was as recently as 1975 when an individual was trapped on Fair Isle. It turned out to be a first-winter male that hung around for two days. Therein began a run of records amounting to possibly 18 birds to date, with all but two records from either Shetland or Fair Isle. The other records were from Dorset, in 1997, and Co. Durham, in 2006.

So why are all the records from the Northern Isles? Very simply, the islands' geographical position makes them an ideal landfall for scarce migratory birds from the east. According to the Migration Project, a scientific collaboration between the Fair Isle Bird Observatory Tust and the University of Aberdeen, migration patterns among birds are generally changing due to climatic and weather patterns.

Also, there have been changes in the summer breeding ranges and population sizes among many species across Europe and eastwards. The research concluded that the number of scarce birds arriving from eastern Europe and Siberia in the autumn has risen sharply over the past 60 years and is continuing to do so.

That said, in the case of the Siberian Rubythroat, thus far the more southerly records prove that it is worth watching out for this exciting bird almost anywhere. What the heck! I am an optimist!

My tips for finding this exotic sprite during the autumn away from Shetland? Try scouring dense thickets and scrub, abandoned cultivated fields, roadside vegetation, hedges, long grass and reedbeds that are all in close vicinity to streams and standing water.

Check low down as they tend to forage in hops and runs with their tails cocked high like Bluethroats. Finally, for all you urban birders out there, don't forget to check urban sites containing all of the above-listed habitats as well as the local parks that nobody ever looks at. You never know, you might be thanking me! BW

David's new book for younger readers, Fly, is out now. It's a fully illustrated collection of more than 150 birds from around the world and is available from all good retailers.

A CHILD'S GUIDE TO BIRDS AND HOW TO SPOT THEM
David Lindo

READER HOLIDAY

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15-22 & 22-29 March, 2025

Pine Marten

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Surf Scoter

BLICKWINKEL/ALAMY

Crested Tit

BEN QUEENBOROUGH/ALAMY

This is a very different holiday, in association with Heatherlea, with displaying and breeding resident birds, winter visitors still present in good numbers, and the first arriving spring migrants. Plus, there's a two-night expedition to the remote, wildlife-rich Ardnamurchan peninsula, where the birding can be unforgettable, and there's a chance to encounter Highland mammals.

There's five nights based at Heatherlea's hotel in Speyside, and two nights over on Ardnamurchan staying at the Glenborrowdale centre, where the group will be the only occupants. There'll be the chance to bait nightly for Pine Marten – on previous tours, they've been seen from the living room!

In Strathspey, we're placed in the middle of the best birding habitats, and a local drive should produce Black Grouse at the lek. Crested Tit and Scottish Crossbill are found in the pine forests and Slavonian Grebe, Whooper Swan and many breeding wader species are likely.

In the moorland and hills we'll search for raptors including Peregrine, Merlin and the first returning Ospreys. A moorland drive may give views of Black-throated Diver on lochs.

The Ardnamurchan peninsula is a hidden jewel, a wild, beautiful, remote area in the heart of the West Highlands. Birds include both eagles, Raven, Black Guillemot and the first spring passage waders, perhaps including Greenshank. Pine Marten are commoner here than anywhere, and other mammals such as Red Squirrel, and Otter at Loch Sunart.

We'll also look for Ptarmigan, Snow Bunting, Goldeneye, Peregrine, Crested Tit and Scottish Crossbill. Local Birch woods hold Lesser Redpoll and Siskin flocks, Slavonian Grebe, Whooper Swan and waders. Waxwings are sometimes present.

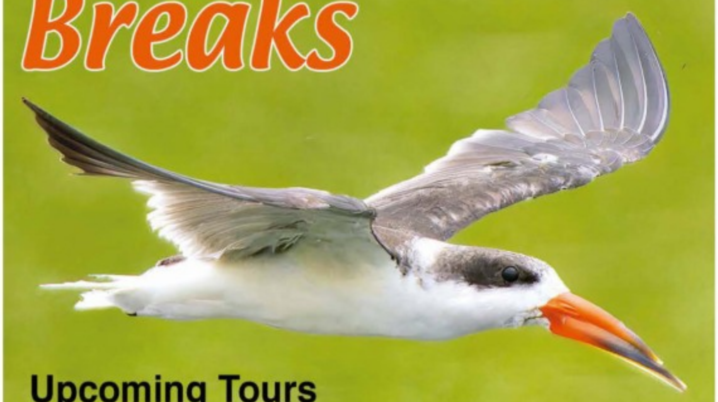
Coastal birding is particularly enjoyable – sightings can include Osprey fishing, rafts of Eider, Goosander, Red-breasted Merganser, Common and Velvet Scoters, Long-tailed Duck, Great Northern and Red-throated Divers, Glaucous and Iceland Gull, and spring waders including Purple Sandpiper, Turnstone, Bar-tailed Godwit, Knot, Dunlin and Ringed Plover. Rarities often include Surf Scoter or King Eider. We often see Bottle-nosed Dolphin, plus auks, Sandwich Tern, Gannet, Corn Bunting, Tree Sparrow, Yellowhammer, Grey Partridge and more.

● For full details, see https://tinyurl.com/bwheatherlea BW

FACT FILE

- 15-22 March 2025, or
- 22-29 March 2025
- £1,695pp, no single supplement, £300 deposit
- Eight days, maximum group size 7 per departure
- Guides: Aidan Branch and Holly Page
- TO BOOK, CALL HEATHERLEA ON 01479 821 248

Birdwatching Breaks



Upcoming Tours

Senegal Sahel to Saloum: Jan 11-23
Guinea-Bissau – Unknown West Africa: Mar 15-28
Armenia – Lower Caucasus: Jun 4-14
Canada – High Arctic: Jun 26- Jul 6
Scottish Highlands – Late winter birds: Mar 2-9
Western Isles: May 12-18
Scottish Highlands – Spring migration: May 18-25

Check our website for prices, trip reports and offers
www.birdwatchingbreaks.com *Tel 01381 610495*

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#My 200 Bird Year
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CELESTRON

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B&S
BARR & STROUD
PRECISION OPTICAL EQUIPMENT

BARR & STROUD 10 YEAR WARRANTY BINOCULARS and TELESCOPES

Close Focus (8x42 models): 2m
F.O.V. (8x42 models): 143m@1000m
Weight (8x42 models): 819g

8x42, 10x42, 8x56, 10x56, 12x56
SRP's from £179.95
8x56ED, 10x56ED, 12x56ED
SRP's from £294.95

"All told, with binoculars like the Savannah (8x42), Barr & Stroud can continue to justly feel proud of the fine heritage in the world of optics." **www.bestbinocularsreviews.com**

SAVANNAH

Close Focus (8x42 models): 2m
F.O.V. (8x42 models): 142m@1000m
Weight (8x42 models): 716g

8x25 & 10x25
SRP £99.95
8x42 & 10x42
SRP £199.95
8x42ED & 10x42ED
SRP £299.95

"The Barr & Stroud Series 5 8 x 42 is a remarkable instrument in a number of respects....The images it serves up are very sharp, bright and show very high contrast with impressive depth of field" **Review by Dr Neil English**

SERIES 5

Close Focus (both models): 1.9m
F.O.V. (8x42 model): 142m@1000m
Weight: 794g

8x42 & 10x42
SRP £189.95

"The Series 8 (8x42) delivers a very bright, sharp image with great contrast....clearly represents great value for money, with optics that closely match its ergonomics" **Review by Dr Neil English**

SERIES 8

All above models are Waterproof with Fully Multi-Coated Optics, Phase Coated BaK-4 Prisms, Protective Rubber Armouring, Robust but lightweight Magnesium Alloy Construction (excl. Savannah) & Twist-Up Eyecups.

Available from dealers throughout the UK
OVL **OPTICAL VISION LIMITED**
Full product details at:
www.barrandstroud.com | www.opticalvision.co.uk

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for the *Great* Outdoors

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www.uttings.co.uk

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Order before 2pm Monday to Friday & get your order **NEXT DAY**

Kowa TSN-99 PROMINAR
ANGLED & STRAIGHT SPOTTING SCOPES

AUTHORISED SPECIALIST DEALER

▲ TE-11WZII ▲ TE-80XW
SYSTEM
PURE
FLUORITE CRYSTAL

BRIGHT, WIDE, CRYSTAL CLEAR
A large 99mm pure fluorite crystal objective lens paired with Kowa XD concave lens produces superior lowlight performance and exquisite detail.

TSN-99 Angled or Straight	**£3229**

EYEPIECES

TE-11WZII 30-70x Wide Angle Zoom	**£599.99**
TE-80XW 40x Wide Angle **NEW**	**£599.99**

BUNDLE OFFER

TSN-99 c/w TE-11WZII 30-70WA	**£3495**

ACCESSORIES

Stay on Case - **£199** 1.6x Extender	**£279**
Digiscoping Adaptor for D-SLR	**£169**
Twist-Up Lockers - for digiscoping	**£10.99**
Protective Filter	**£189**

GO DIGISCOPING *with your* KOWA SCOPE

SMARTOSCOPE VARIO
Digiscoping Adaptor
£159

JUST ATTACH TO ANY SMARTPHONE
Screw in the Kowa eyepiece adaptor & push on to your spotting scope eyepiece

Kowa Eyepiece Adaptor **£29** *BRILLIANT... SO EASY TO USE*

Kowa *Kowa's new flagship model...*
TSN-88 PROMINAR

COLOUR THE WAY NATURE INTENDED
The 88mm pure fluorite crystal objective lens eliminates chromatic aberration for one of the most detailed views of the natural world.

TSN-88S / TSN-88A	**£2535**
TSN-88S / TSN-88A c/w TE-11WZ II WA-Wide Zoom-Eyepiece	**£3135**

ACCESSORIES

Neoprene Stay on Case for TSN-88 - Angled	**£189**
Neoprene Stay on Case for TSN-88 - Straight	**£189**
95mm Protective Filter for TSN-88/880	**£189**
1.6x Extender for TSN-99/88/770	**£279**
Adapter for 1.25" Astronomical Eyepieces (Grub screw)	**£30**
Adapter for 1.25" Astronomical Eyepieces (Knurled screw)	**£30**

DIGISCOPING ADAPTERS

DSLR Adapter for TSN-99/88/66 Series eyepieces	**£169**
Extended Inner Ring for PA7A (for use with TE-80XW)	**£45**
4/3 & Compacts Adapter for TSN-99/88/66 Series eyepieces	**£134**
42mm Standard T2 Fit Adapter Ring with Protecti on Glass	**£53**

Kowa TSN-66 PROMINAR

> *Well, I liked this scope so much, I bought one, having decided that it offered pretty much a perfect balance between portability and high-quality optical performance. If you're looking for a scope with an objective of anywhere between 50mm and 85mm, it's very much worth taking a look at.*
>
> Matt Merritt, Birdwatching Magazine

Exceptional pure fluorite crystal optics that have earned Kowa global acclaim. TSN-66 PROMINAR's cutting-edge technology delivers exceptional optical performance, giving birdwatchers and outdoor enthusiasts access to a level of detail and clarity typically found only in larger, heavier spotting scopes.
With a compact and lightweight body and 66mm objective lens, the TSN-66 PROMINAR is the ideal tool for those who want to travel light, without compromising on image quality when they arrive at their favourite location.

TSN-66S c/w TE-11WZ II WA 25-60x Zoom-Eyepiece	**£2399**
TSN-66A c/w TE-11WZ II WA 25-60x Zoom-Eyepiece	**£2399**

Kowa TSN-55 PROMINAR
PURE FLUORITE SPOTTING SCOPES

PURE FLUORITE CRYSTAL

For those who prioritize portability without sacrificing image quality. Perfect performance that fits in the palm of your hand. Compact yet robust, the TSN-55 PROMINAR measures just 10" in length and weighs a mere 34oz, making it an ideal travel companion.

- Aiming • Twist out sunshade • Dual focus wheel

TSN-55S Straight c/w 17-40x WA-Zoom Eyepiece	**£2089**
TSN-55A Angled c/w 17-40x WA-Zoom Eyepiece	**£2089**
Neoprene Stay on case	£169
58mm Protective Filter	£139
DSLR Adaptor	£134
Hand Strap	£30

HAWKE SPOTTING SCOPES

NO-FAULT LIFETIME WARRANTY

Endurance Angled
Provides the performance to get close to the action and the durability you demand.

	RRP	NOW
20-60x68 ED **NEW**	£749	**£699**
25-75x85 ED **NEW**	£849	**£799**

Endurance ED Compact Angled
Ultra Compact And Lightweight Construction.

	RRP	NOW
13-39x50 ED **NEW**	£499	**£449**
13-45x60 ED **NEW**	£599	**£549**

Nature-Trek
Exceptional optical performance, lightweight & waterproof.

		RRP	NOW
9-27x56 **NEW**	Angled	£249	**£229**
13-39x56 **NEW**	Straight	£299	**£279**
16-48x65	Angled	£299	**£279**
20-60x80	Angled	£349	**£329**

Vantage - Angled
Vantage spotting scopes are supplied with everything you need to get started.

	RRP	NOW
20-60x60	£189	**£169**
24-72x70	£229	**£209**

HAWKE 2024 BINOCULAR RANGE

NO-FAULT LIFETIME WARRANTY

NATURE TREK
Green

	RRP	NOW
8x25	£109	**£99**
10x25	£119	**£109**
8x32	£169	**£149**
10x32	£179	**£159**
8x42	£189	**£169**
10x42	£199	**£179**
10x50	£209	**£189**
12x50	£219	**£199**

ENDURANCE ED
Green or Grey

	RRP	NOW
8x25	£169	**£149**
10x25	£175	**£159**
8x32	£259	**£239**
10x32	£269	**£249**
8x42	£289	**£269**
10x42	£299	**£279**
10x50	£329	**£309**
12x50	£349	**£329**

FRONTIER HDX
Stunning HD viewing...
Green or Grey

	RRP	NOW
8x32	£299	**£279**
10x32	£309	**£289**
8x42	£349	**£329**
10x42	£369	**£349**

FRONTIER EDX
Immerse youself in superior vision
Green or Grey

	RRP	NOW
8x32	£469	**£419**
10x32	£479	**£429**
8x42	£499	**£449**
10x42	£519	**£469**

VANTAGE
Green

	RRP	NOW
8x32	£135	**£125**
10x32	£139	**£129**
8x42	£149	**£139**
10x42	£159	**£149**
10x50	£179	**£169**
12x50	£189	**£179**

FRONTIER APO
Stunning HD. Focus from 2m!
Green

	RRP	NOW
8x42	£729	**£679**
10x42	£749	**£699**

FRONTIER LRF
Laser rangefinding binoculars.
Green

	RRP	NOW
8x42	£999	**£949**
10x42	£1099	**£1049**

Bushnell BINOCULARS

PRIME
Bright images in any weather

	RRP	NOW
10x25	£119.99	**£89.99**
10x28	£169.99	**£129.99**
8x32	£149.99	**£119.99**
8x42	£174.99	**£139.99**
10x42	£189.99	**£149.99**
12x50	£229.99	**£169.99**

LEGEND
Outstanding resolution, contrast, light transmission

	RRP	NOW
8x42	£189.99	**£149.99**
10x42	£219.99	**£169.99**
10x50	£249.99	**£179.99**
12x50	£279.99	**£199.99**

ENGAGE
Amazing colour, resolution & contrast, even in low-light

	RRP	NOW
10x42 DX	£309.99	**£239.99**
12x50 DX	£349.99	**£299.99**
8x42 EDX	£499.99	**£379.99**
10x42 EDX	£519.99	**£399.99**
10x50 EDX	£539.99	**£399.99**
12x50 EDX	£569.99	**£399.99**

ENGAGE X
Quality glass in a lightweight package.

	RRP	NOW
10x42 Black	£170	**£159.99**
10x42 Camo	£197	**£184.99**

FORGE
Low light performance rivaling the most respected optics brands.

	RRP	NOW
10x30	£439.99	**£299.99**
8x42	£579.99	**£379.99**
10x42	£599.99	**£399.99**
15x56	£839.99	**£599.99**

SWAROVSKI OPTIK SWAROVSKI SPOTTING SCOPES

ATS/STS HD
HIGH DEFINITION

Giving you all the features that you would look for in a lightweight, reliable spotting scope; providing the perfect start for anyone taking an interest in birdwatching.

Angled or Straight

ATS/STS HD 65mm	**£1465**
ATS/STS HD 80mm	**£2070**

EYEPIECES

20-60x S Zoom Eyepiece	**£500**
25-50x W Zoom Eyepiece	**£610**

SCOPE & EYEPIECE BUNDLES

ATS/STS HD 65mm c/w 20-60x	**£1900**
ATS/STS HD 65mm c/w 25-50x	**£1994**
ATS/STS HD 80mm c/w 20-60x	**£2490**
ATS/STS HD 80mm c/w 25-50x	**£2584**

ATS/STS ACCESSORIES

Stay on Case	from **£219**
Apochromat Telephoto Lens	**£439**
BR Balance Rail	**£189**

GO DIGISCOPING
with your ATS/STS / ATX/STX SCOPE

SMARTOSCOPE VARIO
Digiscoping Adaptor
£159
Plus Eyepiece Adaptor **£25**

ATX/STX
MODULAR TELESCOPES

Choice of 4 Objective Modules 65, 85, 95,115mm & 2 eyepiece modules (angled / straight), total of 8 options.

OBJECTIVE MODULES

65mm	**£810**
85mm	**£1389**
95mm	**£1750**
115mm	**£2340**

EYEPIECE MODULES

Angled or Straight	**£2045**

ATX/STX BUNDLES

ATX/STX 65mm c/w 25-60x	**£2775**
ATX/STX 85mm c/w 25-60x	**£3354**
ATX/STX 95mm c/w 30-70x	**£3715**
ATX/STX 115mm c/w 30-70x	**£4305**

ATX/STX ACCESSORIES

Stay on Cases for

65 Objective Module	**£129**
85 Objective Module	**£129**
95 Objective Module	**£129**
115 Objective Module	**£129**
STX Eyepiece Module	**£119**
ATX Eyepiece Module	**£119**
Swarovski BR Balance Rail	**£189**
Apochromat Telephoto Lens	**£439**
Tree Fixing Screw	**£69**
T2 Adaptor	**£25**

BTX
BINOCULAR MODULE

Combining the benefits of a spotting scope and binoculars. The unique binocular Asystem uses the visual power of both eyes to view through the scope. Compatible with 65mm, 85mm, 95mm and 115mm objective modules, as well as the ME 1.7x extender eyepiece.

£2415

BTX BINOCULAR MODULE BUNDLES

Objective Spotting Scopes

65mm with BTX Eyepiece	**£3260**
85mm with BTX Eyepiece	**£3850**
95mm with BTX Eyepiece	**£4230**
115mm with BTX Eyepiece	**£4830**
Stay on Case for BTX Eyepiece Module	**£169**

CONNECT
VPA variable phone adapter allows you to quickly connect ATC/STC to a smartphone.
£149

FREE Swarovski cleaning set worth £56 with every bundle

ATC/STC
ADVENTURE AWAITS...

Where pack size and weight matter. Compact dimension, fits easily in any backpack or carry-on bag. Less than 1kg.

Small dimensions Outstanding Optics... Will fit in any backpack

COMPACT LIGHTNESS
Light weight and compact

ATC/STC COLOURS
ATC - Green ▸
ATC - Burnt Orange ▸
STC - Green ▸

- 970g / 34.2oz

ATC 17-40x56..£2040 • STC 17-40x56..£2040

FREE Bushnell

NATUREVIEW 12MP LOW GLOW TRAIL CAMERA
with every Swarovski ATS/STS HD, ATX/STX, ATC/STC & BTX Spotting Scope bundle this month.
(RRP £199.99)

SWAROVSKI OPTIK 2024 TRIPOD SELECTION

UNIVERSAL TRIPOD ADAPTOR
Designed for the EL Range & SLC 42
RRP £117 **£99**

- Wt:1.5kg

◂ CCT COMPACT CARBON TRIPOD
Easy-to-use CCT compact carbon tripod, perfectly equipped for hiking or traveling. It combines low weight and impressive stability - & when it's folded up it's even small enough to fit in your carry-on luggage.
RRP £747 **£679**

PCT PROFESSIONAL CARBON TRIPOD ▸
Rugged enough to withstand challenging conditions such as high winds. It offers the excellent stability that you need for extended periods of observation, and also for professional digiscoping with camera & spotting scope.
RRP £792 **£699**

- Wt:1.8

CTH COMPACT TRIPOD HEAD
Specially developed for fast viewing and digiscoping. Arca-Swiss- compatible quick- release mechanism
RRP £416 **£359**

PTH PROFESSIONAL TRIPOD HEAD
Ideal for extensive observation. The integrated fluid bearing ensures smooth, even movements.
RRP £567 **£469**

SWAROVSKI OPTIK BINOCULARS NL PURE

"WOW!" was the only word I could utter when I took my first look through Swarovski's NL Pure 8x42 binocular.
Mike Alibone

ONE WITH THE MOMENT
Largest-ever field of view with almost indiscernible edges

ONE WITH YOU
Fits perfectly into your hand.

	RRP	NOW
8x32	£2280	**£1965***
10x32	£2340	**£1995***
8x42	£2720	**£2289***
10x42	£2770	**£2325***
12x42	£2810	**£2365***
10x52 **NEW**		**£2910**
14x52 **NEW**		**£2950**
Forehead Rest		**£119**

** Limited offer - see website*

ANNIVERSARY OFFER*
PRICE DROP
on selected NL's & EL's

FREE
Swarovski Bino Suspender Pro worth £58
with every NL Pure purchased

EL SWAROVISION FIELD PRO
c/w Eyepiece cover, objective lens cover & lift carrying strap pro.

	RRP	NOW
8.5x42 WB	£1880	**£1539***
10x42 WB	£1900	**£1579***
10x50 WB	£2520	**£2099**
12x50 WB	£2550	**£1999**

SLC WITH FIELD PACKAGE
c/w field bag, eyepiece cover, objective lens cover & comfort carrying strap

	RRP	NOW
8x56	£2000	**£1900**
10x56	£2040	**£1939**
15x56	£2110	**£2000**

FREE Swarovski Cleaning Set worth £56 with every Swarovski Full Size Binos

SWAROVSKI OPTIK CL

THE FREEDOM TO EXPERIENCE MORE

Small, but with big optical performance, experience interesting moments up close, while observing nature in your own backyard or during your travels.

Urban Jungle
Wild Nature
Northern Lights

CL CURIO
Small, handy, and foldable.

7x21	**£680**

Black | Burnt Orange

CL POCKET
With Wild Nature Accessory Pack.

8x25	**£720**
10x25	**£760**

Green | Anthracite

CL POCKET
With Mountain Accessory Pack.

8x25	**£720**
10x25	**£760**

Green | Anthracite

CL COMPANION
With accessory Pack.

	RRP	NOW
8x30	£1150	**£1090**
10x30	£1190	**£1130**

Green | Anthracite

CL COMPANION NOMAD
Leather Armouring.

	RRP	NOW
8x30	£2440	**£2129**
10x30	£2440	**£2129**

Brown Leather

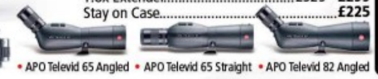
Leica APO TELEVID
SPOTTING SCOPE BUNDLES

Leica APO Televid 65 or 82 Angled Spotting Scope & Leica 25-50x zoom WW ASPH Eyepiece.

	RRP	ONLY
APO Televid 65 Angled Bundle	£2475	**£2299**
APO Televid 65 Straight Bundle	£2475	**£2299**
APO Televid 82 Angled Bundle with Leica Stay on Case	£3355	**£2599**

ACCESSORIES

1.8x Extender	£325	**£299**
Stay on Case		**£225**



- APO Televid 65 Angled • APO Televid 65 Straight • APO Televid 82 Angled

Leica PASSPORT 10YR WARRANTY PLUS 2YR ACCIDENTAL DAMAGE

Leica BINOCULARS & SPOTTING SCOPES

PREMIER AUTHORISED DEALER

APO Televid Spotting Scopes
Detailed, high-contrast images.

Angled or Straight	RRP	NOW
82 c/w 25-50x WW. & Stay on Case	£3355	**£2599**
65 c/w 25-50x WW.	£2475	**£2299**

APO Televid Accessories

Leica 1.8x extender	£325	**£299**
Leica Stay on Case		**£225**

Noctivid
Bright, brilliant image well into dusk! Black or Olive Green

	RRP	NOW
8x42	£2420	**£2049**
10x42	£2420	**£2049**

Ultravid HD Plus
High optical performance

	RRP	NOW
8x32	£1860	**£1599**
10x32	£1860	**£1599**
8x42	£2150	**£1827**
10x42	£2150	**£1827**

Geovid R
Laser range-finding binoculars
from £1350

Trinovid HD
Rugged & compact!

	RRP	NOW
8x32	£910	**£799**
10x32	£910	**£819**
8x42	£1090	**£979**
10x42	£1090	**£979**

PASSPORT 10YR WARRANTY PLUS 2YR ACCIDENTAL DAMAGE

Trinovid BCA Compacts
Exceptional & Rugged.

	RRP	NOW
8x20 BCA	£450	**£385**
10x20BCA	£500	**£439**

Ultravid BR Compacts
Handy and versatile

	RRP	NOW
8x20 BR	£675	**£599**
10x25 BR	£700	**£625**

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VORTEX SPOTTING SCOPES

NO QUIBBLE LIFETIME GUARANTEE

VORTEX
VIP
WARRANTY

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED...

DIAMONDBACK HD

Optically upgraded to feature HD glass & bigger objective lenses for improved clarity and brightness of the image. Fully waterproof.

Angled or Straight c/w Neoprene Stay on Case	RRP	NOW
16-48x65	£479	**£429**
20-60x85	£599	**£539**

VIPER HD

A high-end spotter, without the high-end price tag, the Viper HD Spotting Scope series stands poised to dominate as a best-in-class-optic.

Angled or Straight	RRP	NOW
11-33x50	£665	**£599**
15-45x65	£849	**£765**
20-60-85	£1069	**£965**

RAZOR HD

Simply one of the finest spotting Scopes you can buy High-definition views across the entire field of view

Angled or Straight	RRP	NOW
13-39x56 Travel Scope	£1109	**£999**
22-48x65	£1179	**£1079**
27-60x85	£1619	**£1459**

CROSSFIRE® HD NEW

50mm, 65mm & 80mm SPOTTING SCOPES

Nitrogen Purged - Waterproof - Shockproof

NO QUIBBLE LIFETIME GUARANTEE

The new Vortex Crossfire HD spotting scopes offer users a choice of 3 affordable models each featuring a 3x zoom and an HD optical system with select glass elements to aid resolution, light transmission, colour fidelity and cut chromatic abberation.

The helical (barrel) focus allows for quick and easy focussing while the fully multi-coated lenses have anti-reflective coatings on all air-to glass surfaces for increased light transmission bringing greater clarity and low-light performance.

80mm ▲
65mm ▶
50mm ▶

- ***Includes Neoprene Stay on Case***

80mm Straight ▲
65mm Angled ▲
50mm Straight ▲

	RRP	NOW
20-60x80 Angled	£365	**£329**
20-60x80 Straight	£365	**£329**
16-48x65 Angled	£299	**£269**
16-48x65 Straight	£299	**£269**
12-36x50 Angled	£255	**£229**
12-36x50 Straight	£255	**£229**

VIP WARRANTY

VORTEX

No1 SELLER
AWARD WINNING MODEL
SAVE UP TO £400

BANTAM HD 6.5x32
£89 - See website

TRIUMPH HD 10x42
£119 - See website

UNLIMITED LIFETIME WARRANTY

CROSSFIRE HD

More Colour. More Fidelity. Includes Glasspak binocular harness!

	RRP	NOW
8x42	£189	**£169**
10x42	£199	**£179**
10x50	£229	**£205**
12x50	£239	**£215**

DIAMONDBACK HD

Stunning views, great in low-light

NEW HD MODELS

	RRP	NOW
8x28	£159	**£145**
10x28	£179	**£159**
8x32	£239	**£215**
10x32	£249	**£229**
8x42	£259	**£235**
10x42	£269	**£245**
10x50	£289	**£259**
12x50	£309	**£279**
15x56 NEW	£409	**£369**

VIPER HD

HD extra-low dispersion glass. Award winning binoculars.

	RRP	NOW
8x42	£599	**£539**
10x42	£619	**£559**
10x50	£689	**£619**
12x50	£699	**£629**

RAZOR HD

Small, light, bright, strong. Great optical performance

Superb

	RRP	NOW
8x42	£1049	**£945**
10x42	£1112	**£999**
10x50	£1135	**£1025**
12x50	£1169	**£1055**

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

RAZOR ULTRA HD

Close Focus is an amazing 3.3 feet! Comes complete with a Glasspack Case.

	RRP	NOW
8x32	£1599	**£1439**
10x32	£1649	**£1489**
8x42	£1699	**£1329**
10x42	£1729	**£1359**
10x50	£1759	**£1389**
12x50	£1799	**£1419**
18x56	£1999	**£1499**

NO QUIBBLE LIFETIME GUARANTEE

Nikon 2024 BINOCULAR RANGE

Prostaff P3

Light and tough.

8x30	**£129**
10x30	**£139**
8x42	**£149**
10x42	**£159**

Prostaff P7

Compact and tough.

8x30	**£169**
10x30	**£189**
8x42	**£209**
10x42	**£229**

Monarch M5

Compact and tough.

8x42	**£299**
10x42	**£319**
12x42	**£339**

Monarch M7

Compact and tough.

8x30	**£339**
10x30	**£359**
8x42	**£409**
10x42	**£429**

Monarch HG

Outstanding clarity & wide field of view. For birdwatching or tracking wild animals.

	RRP	NOW
8x30	£899	**£769**
10x30	£949	**£799**
8x42	£999	**£849**
10x42	£1049	**£879**

EDG DCF

Delivering a spectacular field of view. Lenses made with Nikon ED glass.

	RRP	NOW
7x42		**SOLD OUT**
8x42		**SOLD OUT**
10x42	£2299	**£1499**

Canon IMAGE STABILISING BINOCULARS

Super steady view in the most extreme weather conditions.

Protecting Canon's finest quality L-series lenses with a robust, water-proof housing, the 10x42L IS WP binoculars provide unrivalled clarity, and stabilized field scoping performance.

- L-lens quality - the very finest in precision optics
- Optical Image Stabilizer
- Rugged waterproof construction
- 10x Magnification
- Extremely large 4.2mm exit pupil
- Anti-fog technology
- 16mm Long Eye Relief
- Wide 65° angle of view

10x42L IS WP - RRP £1699.99 **£1499.99**

Canon's N°1 Selling Birdwatching, Stabilising Binoculars

opticron IMAGIC IS

IMAGE STABILISING BINOCULARS

IMAGIC IS 10x30
IMAGIC IS 12x30

By electronically and mechanically cancelling out "shake" caused by the natural rhythm of your body, Imagic IS binoculars deliver measurably sharper images compared to non-stabilised models allowing you to see more detail with greater accuracy.

	RRP	NOW
10x30	£569	See website
12x30	£579	
14x30	£599	
16x42 NEW	£849	

FUJIFILM

Value from Innovation

FUJINON *TECHNO-STABI RANGE*

Vibration-Controlled images with Stabilized Binoculars

Image stabilized binoculars equipped with a powerful vibration reduction system for high magnification. They perform well in various scenes such as marine leisure, concerts, and theme parks.

Image stabilization OFF
Image stabilization ON
TS
TS-X

TS-X

Features Fujifilm's strongest vibration-correction system for a steady view in bumpy conditions.

TS-X 1440 14x 1300g Black..**£1099**
TS-X 1440 14x 1300g Navy..**£1099**

TS

Compact series with a high magnification vibration correction feature providing a steady image.

TS12x28 12x 485g Black....**£649**
TS16x28 16x 550g Black....**£699**

ZEISS VICTORY HARPIA

SPOTTING SCOPE

88% Light transmission | ComfortVision concept | Duel speed | Two models availble

High performance spotting scope

Elaborate lens system - FL glass and other custom glass ensure an absolutely sharp and colour fidelity image even at maximum magnification.

85 ▶
95 ▼
ZEISS T* Coating
Eyepiece

Victory Harpia 85 - 22x65 - Body Only	**£3300**
Victory Harpia 95 - 32x70 - Body Only	**£3700**
Eyepiece to fit 22x65 (85) or 23x70 (95)	**£705**

ZEISS CONQUEST GAVIA 85

SPOTTING SCOPE

Short close-focus | 85mm objective lens diameter | 60x magnification

Explorers companion

The ZEISS T* coating gives brilliant, high-contrast images which makes this ideal in adverse light conditions and in the twilight. This scope provides birdwatchers and nature observers with a high-performance spotting scope that is simply great value.

ZEISS T* Coating

Conquest Gavia 85 30-60x............**£1850**

ZEISS VICTORY SFL

BINOCULARS

90% Light transmission | Ultralight & compact Design | Perfect Ergonomics | Four models available

Lightweight model among high-performance binoculars.

New Ultra-High-Definition (UHD) concept ensures true-to-life color reproduction and the highest level of detail.

Victory SFL 8x30	460g	**£1300**
Victory SFL 10x30	460g	**£1350**
Victory SFL 8x40	640g	**£1550**
Victory SFL 10x40	640g	**£1600**

ZEISS VICTORY SF

BINOCULARS

Rediscover the world of birdwatching with the ZEISS Victory® SF.

Experience every spectacle nature has to offer with brilliant optics and an unparalleled wide-angle field of view. Light weight with a unique ergonomic design and dynamic fast-focus feature allows for hours of relaxing birding without fatigue.

Victory SF 8x32	**£2250**
Victory SF 10x32	**£2300**
Victory SF 8x42	**£2500**
Victory SF 10x42	**£2550**

ZEISS TERRA ED

Perfect for every trip - robust, reliable and easy to use.

Terra ED Pocket 8x25	Terra ED Pocket 10x25	Terra ED 8x32	Terra ED 10x32	Terra ED 8x42	Terra ED 10x42
Black/Grey or Black	Black/Grey or Black	Black, Black/Grey or Green/Black	Black, Black/Grey or Green/Black	Black, Black/Grey or Green/Black	Black, Black/Grey or Green/Black
£325	**£345**	**£430**	**£480**	**£480**	**£530**

ZEISS CONQUEST HD PROMOTIONS

Perfect all-rounder - outstanding performance for ambitious nature observation.

Conquest HD 8x32	Conquest HD 10x32	Conquest HD 8x42	Conquest HD 10x42	Conquest HD 8x56	Conquest HD 10x56
SAVE £213	SAVE £225	SAVE £269	SAVE £275	SAVE £350	SAVE £363
Black	Black	Black	Black	Black	Black
WAS £850	WAS £900	WAS £1075	WAS £1100	WAS £1400	WAS £1450
NOW £637	**NOW £675**	**NOW £806**	**NOW £825**	**NOW £1050**	**NOW £1087**

ZEISS THERMAL IMAGING PROMOTIONS

Enhance your nature experience - for more discoveries at night and during the day.

Nighttime
Daytime
Research

Compact & lightweight | High resolution LCOS Display
Precise zoom | Two models available

ZSIP Pro image processing | Romovable battery
High resolution AMOLED Display | Two models availble

DTI 1/19	DTI 1/25	DTI 6/20	DTI 6/40
SAVE £576	SAVE £651	SAVE £1750	SAVE £1750
WAS £1475	WAS £1650	WAS £4000	WAS £4250
NOW £899	**NOW £999**	**NOW £2250**	**NOW £2500**

HIKMICRO THERMAL IMAGING FOR BIRDWATCHING

WE ARE PROUD TO BE A HIKMICRO AUTHORIZED DEALER

LYNX 2.0 - 19mm

Thermal Imaging Monocular

Exceptional Value for money: Priced competitively for both day and night bird-watching enthusiasts, it's perfect for capturing and sharing bird-watching moments with ease.

RRP £1049.99 **£999.99**

FALCON FH25

Thermal Imaging Monocular

For both amateur & professional users, excels in both short to medium ranges. The sensitivity helps to spot birds easily in dense vegetation and low light conditions, including twilight and night.

RRP £1499.99 **£1399.99**

FALCON FQ25 PRO

Thermal Imaging Monocular

The nature specialist, HIKMICRO's go-to thermal monocular for bird watching since its release. Exceptional Thermal Clarity and ultra- wide field of view, detects birds in dense foliage or twilight conditions. Offers enhanced identification performance.

RRP £1799.99 **£1699.99**

HARBROK 4K HE25L

Thermal Imaging Bionoculars

Thermal Binoculars are a game-changer for bird-watching enthusiasts, making it easier than ever to locate birds in dense foliage or low-light conditions. Combined with a 4K optical camera for seamless and superior day and night bird-watching.

RRP £1299.99 **£1199.99**

PULSAR THERMAL IMAGING FOR BIRDWATCHING

STREAM VISION 2

AXION XQ30 PRO

Thermal Imaging Monocular

A good thermal imager for bird-watching, especially if you're looking for a compact, portable, and mid-range device. Suitable for birdwatching In closer or mid-range environments.

XQ33 - 384x288..........**£1069.95**

AXION COMPACT XG30

Thermal Imaging Monocular

Best for Medium-Range Bird-watching: with a detection range of 1,300m. For observing birds in forests, parks, wetlands, or other environments where distances are less extreme.

XG30 - 640x480...........**£1399.95**

AXION COMPACT XG35

Thermal Imaging Monocular

Best for Long-Range Birdwatching: with a detection range of 1,750m. For observing birds in large open areas like fields, coasts, or mountains, where birds are often farther away.

XG35 - 640x480...........**£1579.95**

TELOS XP50

Thermal Imaging Monocular

Perfect for long-range bird-watching where image detail is critical, especially when observing large raptors or other birds of prey from a distance.

XP50 - 640x480...........**£2689.95**

ZEISS SECACAM NEW

TRAIL CAMERAS

Cellular trail camera | Compact design | Light weight | Convenient installation | Easy maintenance

Outstanding performance. New amazing price

Observe wildlife as undisturbed as possible: the barely noticeable Secacam is small with a camouflage pattern, so it effortlessly evades prying eyes. The wide angle version has an enlarged Field of View to overlook a wider area.

	Sensor	LED's	Range	Weight	WAS	RRP
Secacam 5	12MP	60 Black	25m	320g	£199	**£159.99**
Secacam 5 Wide Angle	12MP	60 Black	25m	440g		**£159.99**
Secacam 7	12MP	60 Black	25m	440g	£249	**£199.99**

Accessories: Padlock - **£12.99** • 4G Antenna - **£14.99** • Tree Band - **£10.99** • Battery Tray - **£12.99**

NEW

SECACAM 3
TRAIL CAMERA
£119.99

E+OE Prices subject to change. Goods subject to availability

Reflecting on 2024

New Year is the perfect time to take stock of what you're learning in your photography, writes **Rob Read**…

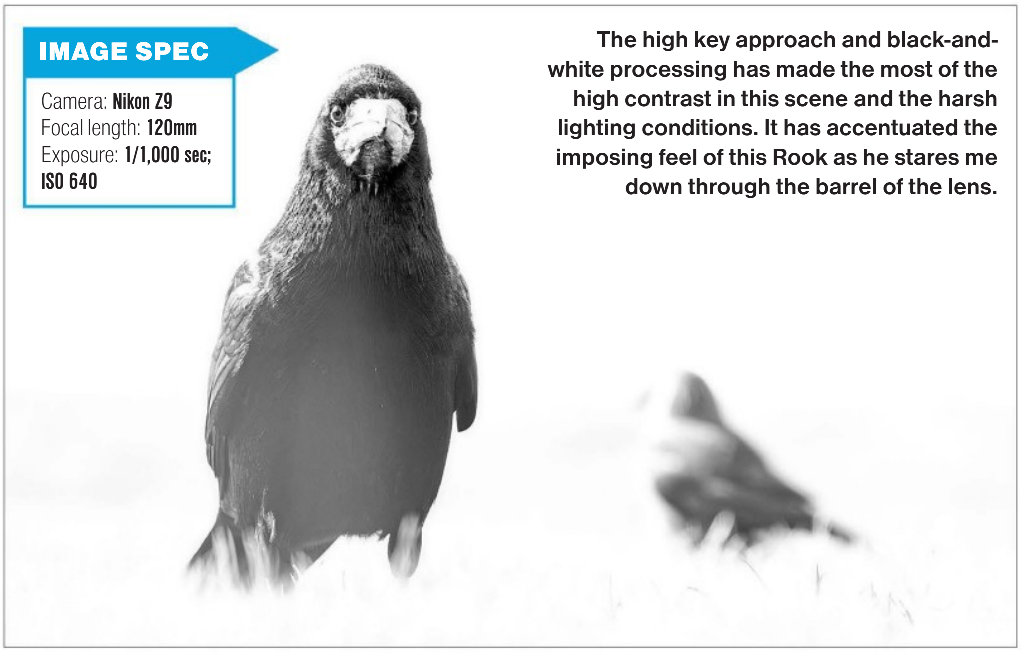


IMAGE SPEC

Camera: **Nikon Z9**
Focal length: **120mm**
Exposure: **1/1,000 sec; ISO 640**

The high key approach and black-and-white processing has made the most of the high contrast in this scene and the harsh lighting conditions. It has accentuated the imposing feel of this Rook as he stares me down through the barrel of the lens.

The new year is always a bit of a psychological watershed; a time to reflect on the previous year and make plans for the year just started. For me, this means looking back on the photographs I have taken, the lessons I've learned, and planning the direction I'd like to explore with my photography over the coming months. I don't see photography as something I can ever say I've mastered. Like all art forms, there is always something new to learn, avenues to explore, and 'improvements' to be made. And this continuous learning process is what keeps my love of photography fresh and exciting.

All good plans come from a detailed review of the past. In my case, a review of my favourite images from 2024 and the reasons behind my choices. I try to keep these selections objective and remove any emotional attachments I have with them as I want to focus on the artistic merits of each image to help shape the future direction of my work. But it is difficult not to be drawn to images of special birds, special places, and special times. Here, I'm sharing my three favourite photographs from 2024, the reasons for those choices, and the way they will hopefully inspire and shape my work in 2025.

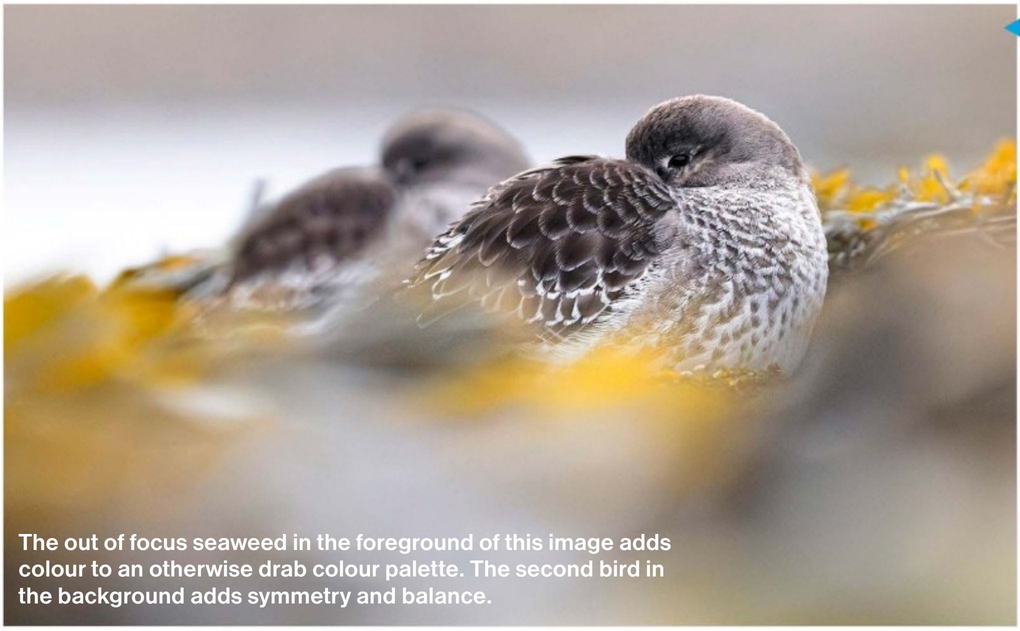
When I started to review my images, one thing became startlingly obvious – there were a distinct lack of images that were taken with dramatic light. At first this surprised me, but then I remembered how dull and miserable the weather had been over the year, particularly during the winter and spring months when the sun is at its lowest angle and the light can be at its most dramatic. Even when I spent an afternoon at the Camargue Bird Park in southern France in the summer, the weather was dull and overcast. Last year forced me to practise with different techniques in tricky conditions simply to get something on the memory cards, and the first image (at the top of the opposite page) is a classic example of dull lighting making the job of taking an interesting image challenging.

Every year, my wife and I like to take a January break on the coast in Wales. The light by the sea is always so different and seems to extend the short daylight hours at this time of the year. The cottage we rent is right on the beach, meaning I can roll out of bed, pull on my neoprene chest waders and lie amongst the rocks photographing the wading birds as the sun comes up.

During our visit last January, numbers of Purple Sandpiper would feed and snooze yards from the cottage on a reef of hard rocks uncovered by the tide. Approaching them slowly and with a low profile (crawling most of the way) I could get surprisingly close to the birds without causing alarm. They knew I was there, but were happy to stay if I observed a respectful distance. I spent hours lying in the pools and on the rocks, watching them and taking their portraits. To spend time alone with these amazing birds was such a privilege, but I longed for some beautiful dawn light to work with. It never arrived. Instead, I was forced to work with the overcast conditions, and this image is my favourite from my time with them.

Not only does this image remind me of those magical mornings, but it represents a watershed in my work; it draws on all the early skills I learnt as a bird photographer, while layering in some of the more artistic elements which have elevated the image. It acts as a reminder of my photographic roots and highlights how far my work has come; all the classic elements are there – correct exposure, focus point on the eye of the main bird, composition around the rule of thirds, etc. But there are some touches that I worked hard to achieve in the image, too, the first of which is the position of the second out-of-focus bird in the background. Notice how the pose and shape of this bird mirrors our main character perfectly, adding symmetry to the photograph. Secondly, the dull conditions, although perfect for capturing plenty of detail in the bird, produced a very flat and uninspiring colour palette and I wanted to add some colour. This was achieved by positioning the lens close to a clump of seaweed. Focusing on the birds meant this would naturally be out of focus and simply add in a brighter colour wash in the foreground of the frame. Using out of focus elements like this is something I will continue to use in 2025.

My second choice is this rather characterful looking Rook (above) taken using a high key approach. He looks rather grumpy, if not a little menacing, and I'm tempted to title it 'The Bouncer'. This image was taken in the bright light of the middle of the day; hardly ideal conditions. I love the high



The out of focus seaweed in the foreground of this image adds colour to an otherwise drab colour palette. The second bird in the background adds symmetry and balance.

IMAGE SPEC

Camera: **Nikon Z9**
Focal length: **500mm**
Exposure: **1/800 sec; ISO 4,000**

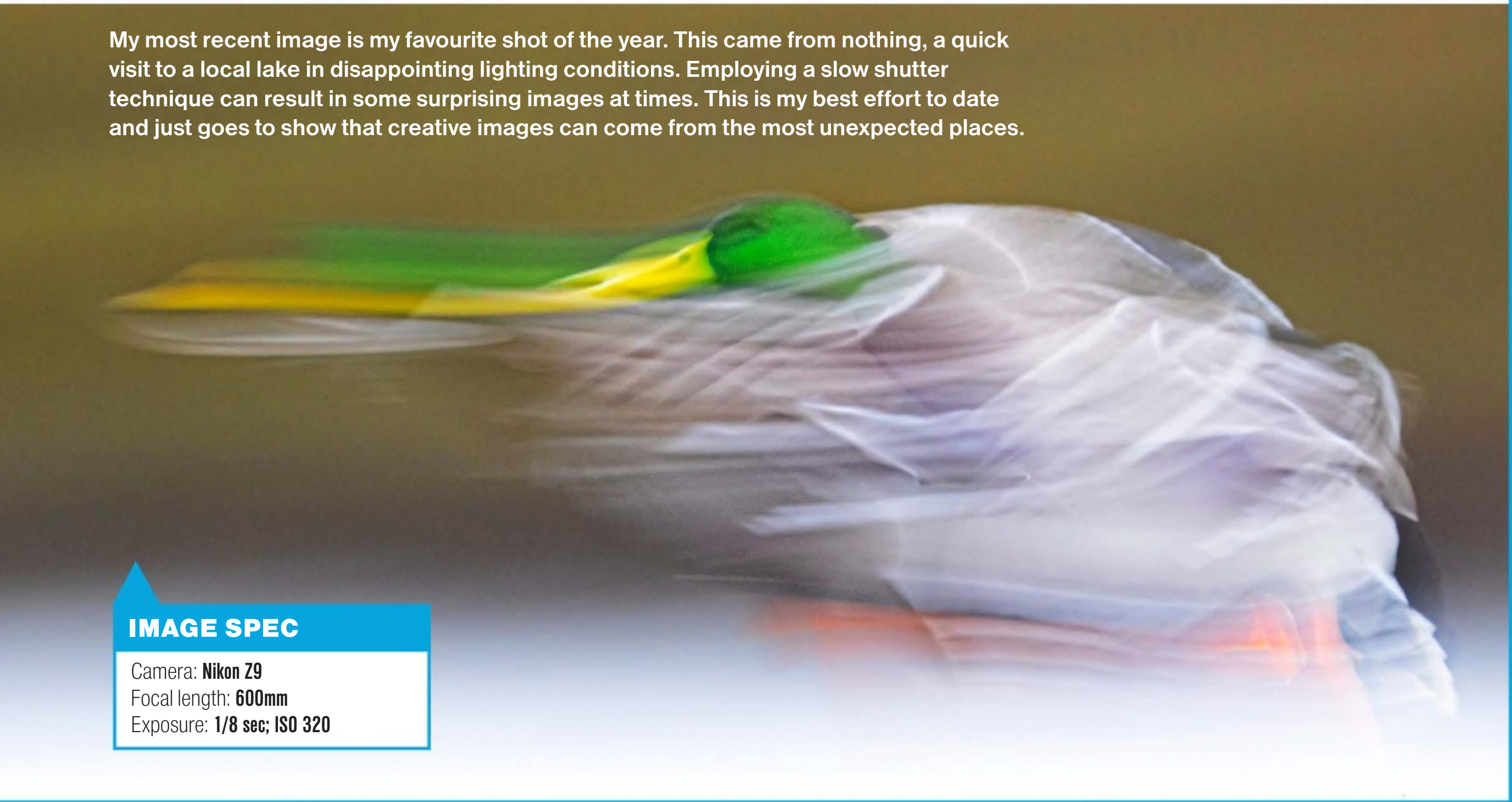
key approach as it works well both when the light is harsh and when it's dull and flat. It's a technique that I used a lot in 2024 and will continue to layer into my work going forward. The essence behind it is to deliberately overexpose the image – this can help remove distracting background elements such as dull skies and focus attention on the subject. It works particularly well with high contrast scenes – in this case the dark plumage of the Rook, the white sky, and the bright green grass. Removing the colour ensures that the photograph is all about the shape and form. The character in the background is an important element. It helps to balance the shot and adds an extra dimension to it, similar to the Purple Sandpipers, in fact.

The final image is a photograph from a shoot I had a couple of days before writing this piece and is my favourite of the year. I wrote in last month's article about using slow shutter speeds and how it can produce very interesting and unique results – a perfect approach for those dull light conditions.

When I arrived at a local lake for a quick session before dusk, I wasn't expecting much but it was just good to be out. I'd hoped for nice evening light, but clouds thwarted me, so I settled on experimenting with slow shutter and flying birds instead. Nothing much took to the air, and I was about to leave when someone arrived with bread to feed the ducks. Cue many airborne Mallards making a dash for the free meal and an opportunity to hit the shutter. The thing about slow shutter is that you just can't predict how the images will turn out; there are so many variables at play: movement of the subject and the camera, the shutter speed, the distance the subject is from you etc. Most of the photographs get deleted, but every now and then...

The image works because its instantly recognisable as a Mallard. The fact that the head is clear and relatively sharp is the key part, the x-factor is the shape those swirling wings make as they wrap their wispy cloak around the bird. I also really like the distinct contrast between the overexposed white water anchoring the bottom of the frame and the darker background. It's dynamic, it's intriguing, it's different and just such a surprise from a session I had no idea would yield such a unique image.

My journey in 2024 has taught me that, if I want to produce new and innovative work that stands out, I need to take a bold approach no matter what the conditions. Work with the subjects you have in front of you, adapt to the conditions you have, experiment with new techniques; but, above all else, don't be afraid to fail. What will 2025 look like for you? BW



My most recent image is my favourite shot of the year. This came from nothing, a quick visit to a local lake in disappointing lighting conditions. Employing a slow shutter technique can result in some surprising images at times. This is my best effort to date and just goes to show that creative images can come from the most unexpected places.

IMAGE SPEC

Camera: **Nikon Z9**
Focal length: **600mm**
Exposure: **1/8 sec; ISO 320**

GEARFINDER

The best optics and outdoor products tried & tested for you

BINOCULARS

RSPB BUZZARD 8X42

£540

David Chandler

They're compact, very sturdy, and pack exceptional close-focus

Focusing wheel and dioptre ring are more deeply ridged than on many binoculars

RSPB
8x42
BUZZARD®
ED
MULTICOATED
WATERPROOF
FIELD 8.1°

There are two binoculars in the new RSPB Buzzard range – 8x42 and 10x42 models. These are mid-priced binoculars with distinctive styling – a silver-grey focusing wheel and dioptre ring, and are said to deliver 'exceptional performance'. The glass includes ED and field-flattening lenses. Viking sent me one of each – I spent my time with the 8x.

The feel

At 740g this is a bit heavier than some 8x42s but it didn't feel heavy around my neck, even with a thermal imaging device hanging there too. Build quality seems good – this feels like a sturdy binocular that could take a bit of rough treatment (not recommended!). There are shallow thumb indents on the underside and the focusing wheel and dioptre ring are more heavily ridged than most. It is, as you would expect, armoured, waterproof and filled with nitrogen. The dioptre ring isn't locking but stays in place well enough once set. The twist-up eyecups have two intermediate positions, were comfortable against my face and had a very good, reassuring action – better than some. You'd think this was easy to get right but some binoculars do this better than others.

View and focusing

The view through this Buzzard is clean and bright, with, I'd say, cool rather than warm colours. The view feels wide and it is – these are wide-angle binoculars. Sharpness is very good but not quite edge to edge – there's a narrow ring of peripheral softness. Don't be put off by that – it's not an issue. Brightness is also very good and the Buzzard impressed in low light, revealing colour on leaves in close shade and on distant trees 20 minutes after an overcast sunset, and colours on fly-by Long-tailed Tits 14 minutes post-sunset. A Starling murmuration beyond the trees, 15-20,000 birds maybe, was good, too!

Focusing precision is good, with, sometimes, some 'hunting' to find best focus. The focus wheel is a little wider than one finger and moves fairly stiffly but smoothly. Two revolutions are possible, anti-clockwise towards the horizon, but in normal birding you won't use more than about 3/8 of a turn. There's an index mark on the focus wheel, and I think most of us wouldn't make any use of that.

I didn't notice any significant chromatic aberration, just a tad, I think, on a backlit Fieldfare. Performance against the light was good, but, with side-lighting, the Buzzard was perhaps a bit more prone to eyepiece flare spots than some binoculars. This is another binocular where the official close-focus figure is wrong, at least for me. Two metres they say, which is par for the course. My tape measure said it was about 1.3m, which is very, very good – this binocular is better than most for butterfly- and dragonfly-watching. BW

SPECS

Eye relief: 18.4mm
Field of view: 8.1°/142m@1,000m
Close focus: 2m
Weight: 740g
Size: 143x135x53mm
RRP: £540 (10x42: £550)
Warranty: 10 years
Supplied with: Contoured, neoprene strap; case; tethered, removable objective caps; rainguard
Web: vikingopticalcentres.co.uk, shopping.rspb.org.uk

VERDICT

A solid, competent, wide-angle, mid-range binocular with excellent close-focus. I do have a gripe about the packaging, though. On the box it says 'Do not recycle'. Surely, they can do better than that? Binocular choice is a personal thing. What works well for me might not for you. As ever, our advice, if you can, is try before you buy. And if you can't, ask the retailer about their returns policy just in case you don't get on with your new binocular.

RATINGS

OPTICS	★★★★☆
HANDLING	★★★★☆
PRICE	★★★⯪☆
OVERALL	★★★★☆

WishList

More stuff to spend your hard-earned cash on

WORDS **DAVID CHANDLER**

GRUBS MUDDIES PUDDLE 5.0 TODDLER'S BOOT, £49.95

Don't let a bit of mud and water stop toddler time outdoors. Start them young with these fleece-lined, calf-length boots. They have tough, rubber soles, 5mm neoprene around the legs for warmth and comfort, and an "underfoot chassis". Velcro fastening makes them easy to get off and they are rated for use from -20°C to +20°C. Maybe stay in if it's that cold, though. In dino/lime, dino/bellweather, space/navy, space/orange or flower/teal. Children's sizes 2-8. grubswarehouse.com

URTH ARKOSE 20L BACKPACK AND CAMERA INSERT, £179

It's a backpack, or backpack and compact camera bag combined. The removable, padded camera insert fits perfectly in the lower zipped compartment and takes a DSLR, a lens and other bits and pieces. The recycled nylon backpack has padded laptop and tablet storage, space for a water bottle, other pockets and a tripod holder. In black, ash grey or green. parkcameras.com

NIKON Z50II MIRRORLESS CAMERA BODY, £849

A new DX Nikon with "deep-learning technology", it "makes shooting great-looking photos and video effortless". It has predictive focus-tracking, intelligent autofocus recognises birds, and Advanced AF-A mode switches from AF-S to AF-C if the subject moves. Native ISO goes up to 51,200 for stills, records 4K UHD/30p video, can blast at 30fps with pre-release capture and has the brightest EVF "in its class". 495g. nikon.co.uk

LED LENSER HF8R CORE RGB RECHARGEABLE HEAD TORCH, £139.95

They market this for fishermen but I like it. It has a red light which maintains night vision and reduces disturbance to wildlife. "Adaptive light beam tech" dims and focuses the light automatically – clever. It's IP68 waterproof, tough, and magnetic charging does a full recharge in 270 minutes. Three brightness levels and boost mode. 194g. Two-year warranty extendable to seven. ledlenser.co.uk

JOHN BEATTY WILD NATURE DIARY 2025, £16.50

It's calendar and diary buying time. Each photo in this diary "helps us to connect with nature". It's a week-to-view diary, with one big and three small photos each week, plus a caption and a map showing where the pic was taken. The photos are "the work of Britain's top nature and landscape photographers". And you get a foreword by Iolo Williams. 205x192mm, wire-bound, softback. wild-nature.co.uk

FUJINON XF 500MM F5.6 R LM OIS WR LENS, £2,899

With the crop factor this is the equivalent of a 762mm lens, this is a super-telephoto for Fujifilm X cameras. For even more reach, add the 1.4x or 2.0x teleconverter (£399 each) for 1,067mm or 1,524mm equivalent. Surely that's enough? It has two Super ED and five ED lenses, 5.5 stops of IS, and quick, silent autofocus. It's dust and weather-resistant, weighs 1,335g, and the front lens is anti-stain and shuns water. eshop.fujifilm-x.com/uk

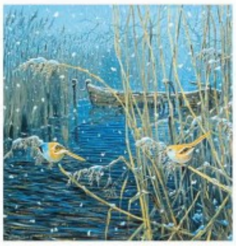
GOPRESSO PRO PORTABLE ESPRESSO MACHINE, £109.99

Can't be bothered with the tearoom? This is small and light and can heat cold water or work with hot water. You can use it with ground coffee or coffee pods. Add cold water, put the lid on, add coffee, switch on. In three to four minutes you have "barista quality espresso". The battery does up to four brews from cold, or more than 100 with hot water before you need to recharge. GoPresso is a member of 1% for the Planet. gopresso.co.uk

PUFFIN COLONY RECYCLED CHRISTMAS CRACKERS WITH TOY GLIDERS, £18

Each one in the six pack contains a different bird glider. Will you get the Kingfisher? Jay? Puffin? Green Woodpecker? Osprey? Mallard? Turkey? Crackers get bad environmental press. But these are made from recycled, sustainably sourced paper, contain no plastic and are in recyclable packaging. The audited Chinese factory has good ethics and good environmental credentials. The crackers travel by surface transport. I lied about the Turkey. shopping.rspb.org.uk

BEARDED TIT CHRISTMAS CARDS, £5 FOR 5



It's not a Robin. But the BTO sell other Steve Cale cards, including one with a Robin on. Or why not be radical and go with a Barn Owl or Black Grouse? Or a Bearded Tit (or, more accurately, a Moustached Reedling...)? Whichever one you choose, they all look suitably wintry. Inside, it says 'Seasons Greetings'. On FSC paper and "carbon-balanced". They even throw in five envelopesl. british-trust-for-ornithology.myshopify.com

Book Review

John Miles rounds up some recent releases…

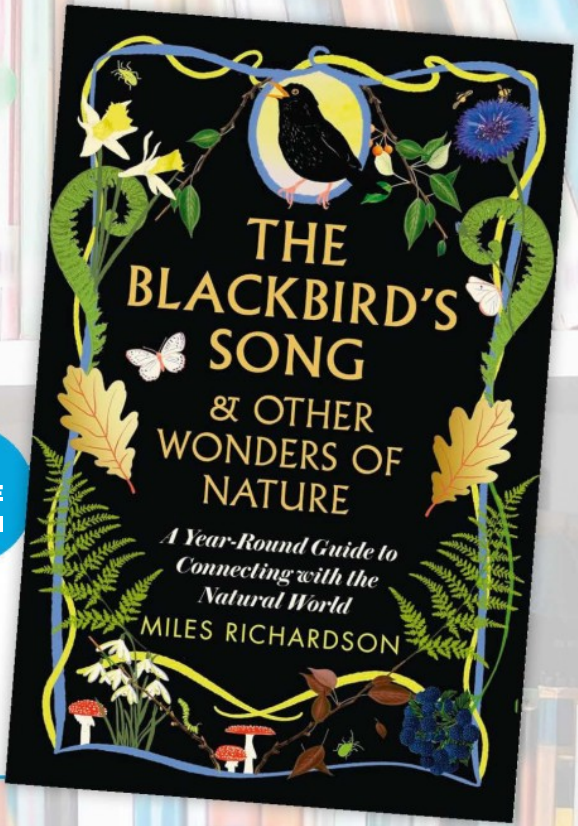
BOOK OF THE MONTH

THE BLACKBIRD'S SONG

BY MILES RICHARDSON

NEW RIVER, HB, £14.99

Here is a book which tries to get you to note down at least three of the good things you see in nature every day. Wellbeing and health is at the heart of the book, which follows the seasons, taking you on a journey with nature through the year. Species such as Chiffchaff tell you that spring is here, whereas a flock of Long-tailed Tits might herald the coming of autumn. There are lots of good things in this book to keep you in good health and enjoying nature that little bit more.


THE BLACKBIRD'S SONG
& OTHER WONDERS OF NATURE
A Year-Round Guide to Connecting with the Natural World
MILES RICHARDSON

Of the trees and the birds
Ian Parsons

OF THE TREES AND THE BIRDS

BY IAN PARSONS

WHITTLES, SB, £18.99

Our own Ian has done it again. This time he has joined his love for trees with birds, and takes you around the world to look at some of the amazing coexistence and synergy, where birds benefit trees and vice versa. Of course, there are our native species such as Holly and Rowan, with berries providing food for birds, and birds aiding distribution of seeds around the countryside, while how could he miss out the Jay for its exceptional relationship with the Oak (he didn't, of course)? There is plenty for everyone in this fine book.

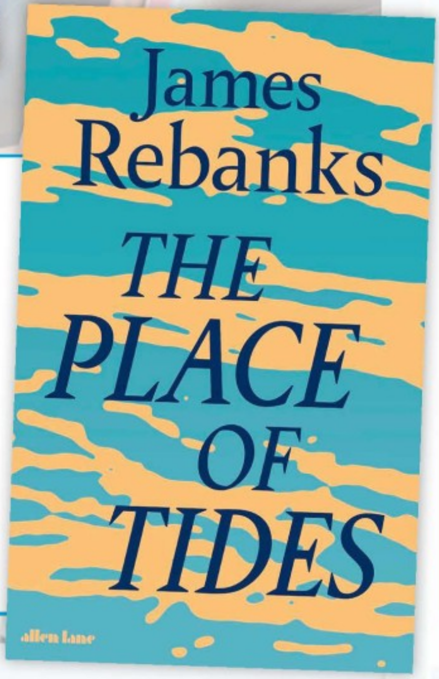
THE VOLUNTEERS
A memoir of conservation, companionship & community
CAROL DONALDSON

THE VOLUNTEERS

BY CAROL DONALDSON

SUMMERDALE, SB, £10.99

If you have ever wondered what it would be like to volunteer for a charity, then this book gives you an insight into how the long-term volunteers become attached or unattached. A former staff member of the RSPB moves from recruitment to the hard labour of organising the recruits, driving and sorting out tools etc. The complex relationships are just one of the subjects in here and, of course, the day-to-day workplaces. Funding and sorting out who can pay for using these recruits adds to the problems, so it makes for an interesting read.


James Rebanks
THE PLACE OF TIDES
allen lane

THE PLACE OF TIDES

BY JAMES REBANKS

ALLEN LANE, HB, £22

If you like Eiders, you'll love this story. No, there are no Eiders nesting inland in his native Lake District, but this book takes the farmer to wild islands way out in Northern Norway, where a way of life gathering Eider down is being preserved. James covers a full season on one of these islands, from making nests for the birds to scaring off their predators. It makes you wonder if this sort of way of life even occurred here in Britain a long time ago and, like so many things, was lost. Enjoy.

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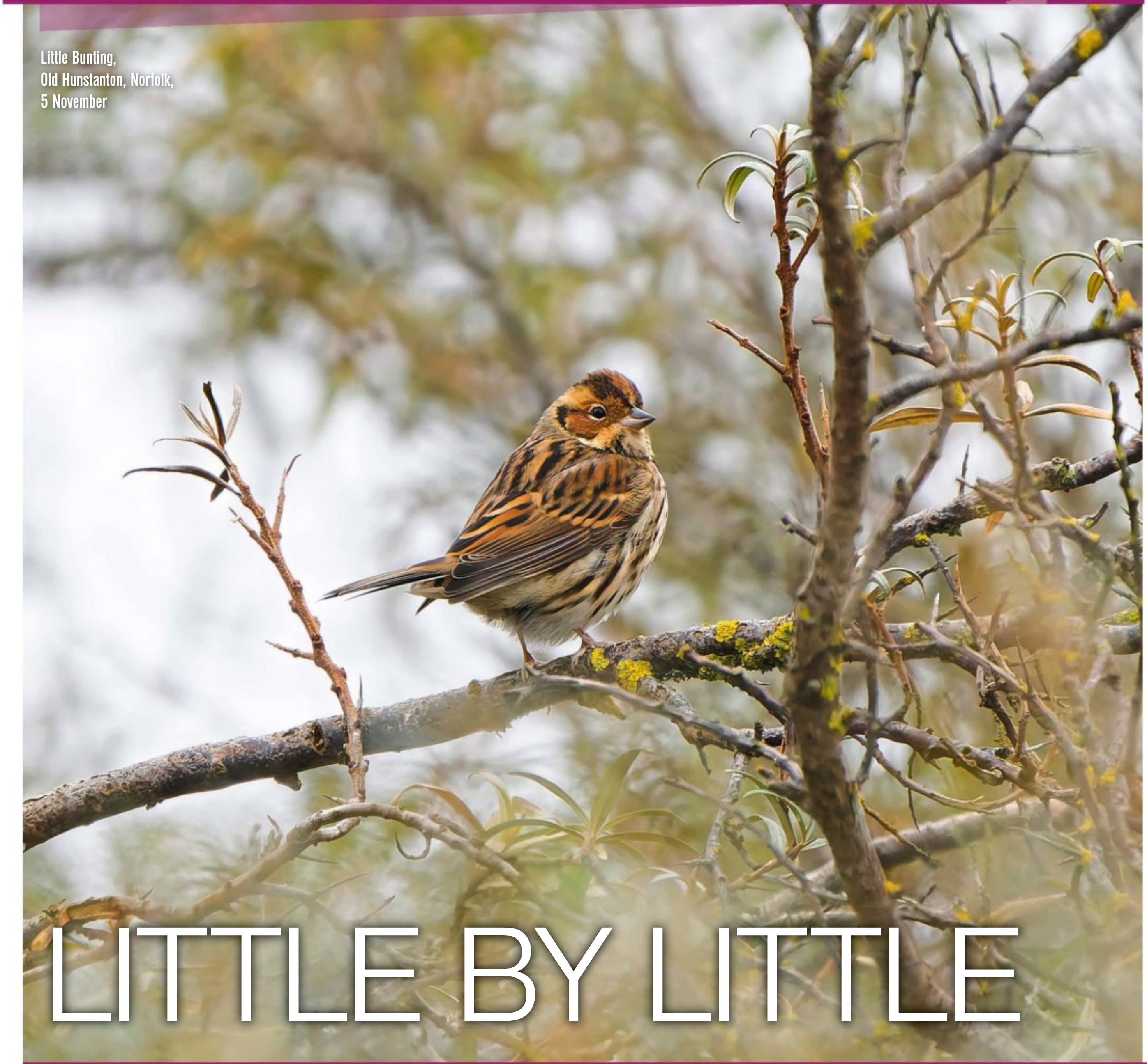
UKBIRDSIGHTINGS

The best rare birds seen all around Britain in November

COMPILED BY MIKE WEEDON



Little Bunting, Old Hunstanton, Norfolk, 5 November

STEVE GANTLETT

LITTLE BY LITTLE

Each year, November seems to throw up more and more, rarer and rarer birds

While we never tire of repeating the cliché that September is the new October, it is probably a little premature to say that, little by little, November is becoming the new October. That said, the wealth of rare birds during the penultimate month of the year seems to be getting richer year on year. The month's outstanding rarity was a real beauty, though not without a whiff of controversy. Despite its name, it was a bright yellow beauty, a first-winter male Scarlet Tanager roughly halfway between Halifax and Bradford (West Yorkshire) at a place called Shelf (by Northowram), and was present perhaps since about 8th. News broke online of the bird being in gardens etc there on 10th, and on 11th was soon relocated by the gathered birders. It stayed for a couple more days, last being seen on 13th. This would be the ninth UK record, with previous records being from Scilly, Cornwall, Outer Hebrides and Co. Down, if accepted.

Any potential controversy was merely owing to it being an inland (rather than western seaboard) sighting. But, there are plenty of precedents of North American passerines inland and in people's gardens; think American Robins, Baltimore Orioles and, of course, those garden staples, Slate-coloured Juncos). One of the latter

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GRAHAM CATLEY

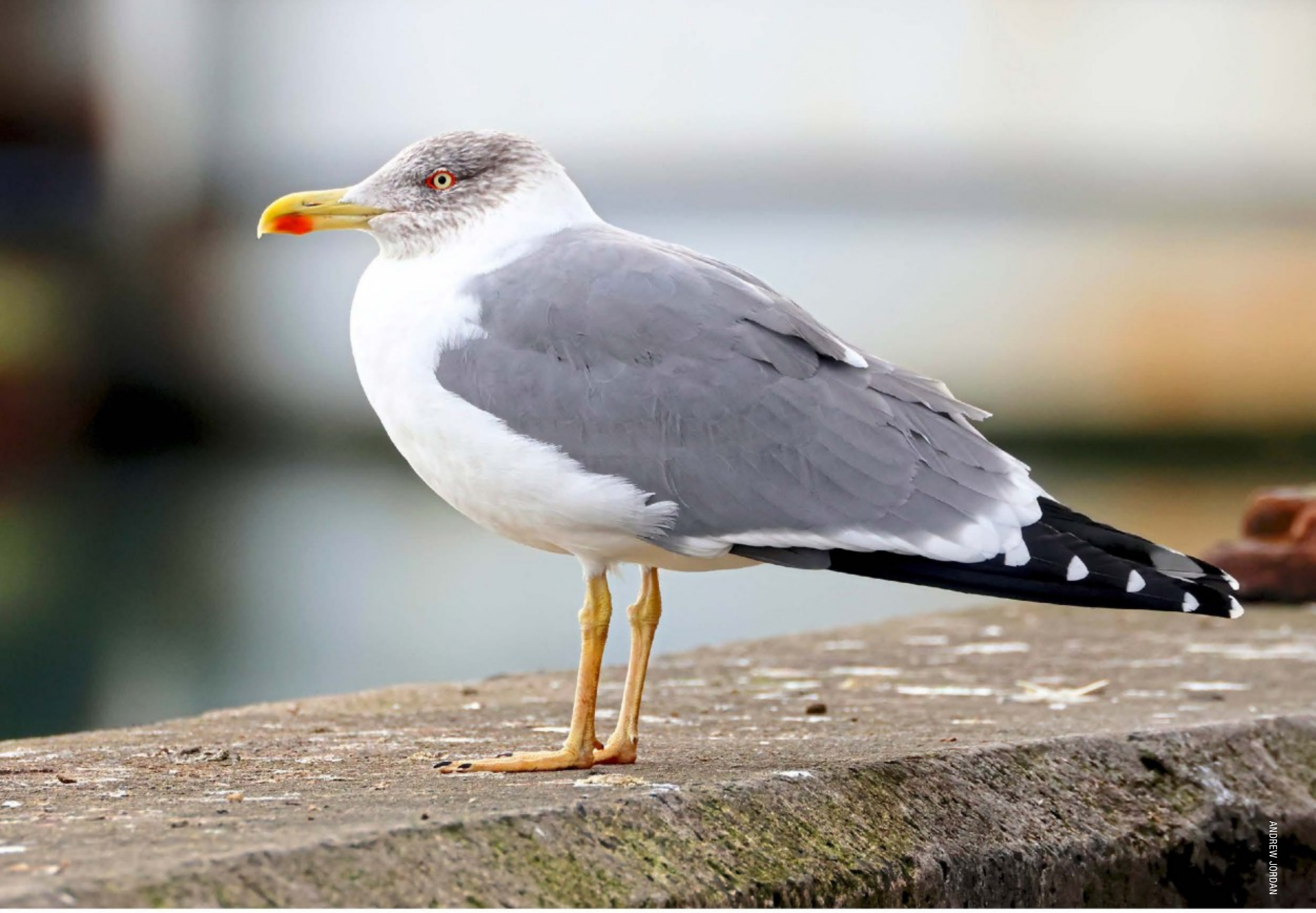
HUGH HARROP

species was inevitably on a private garden at Upton, Poole, Dorset in the second week of the month.

A couple of other (potential) extreme North American rarities were also about during November. These included a Rough-legged Buzzard in south-western Cornwall showing characteristics of the subspecies *sanctijohannis* aka Rough-legged Hawk (3rd to 9th). A Red-necked Grebe at Portland Harbour, Dorset, looking very much the North American subspecies also known as Holboell's Red-necked Grebe was present from late October to 8th.

Also very rare from North America, and certain in its identity, an American Coot was found at Loch of Spiggie, Mainland, Shetland, on 26th, hanging out with Coots, and still present into December. There have only been a dozen ever UK records of this species since its first occurrence at Stodmarsh, Kent, in April 1996. Another North American bird swimming about on Shetland, a drake Bufflehead, was at Ham Voe, Foula from 17th into December.

While on Shetland, note should be made of exceptional numbers of rarer shearwaters passing these northern islands during the month, including a record 65 past Skaw, Unst, on 17th.



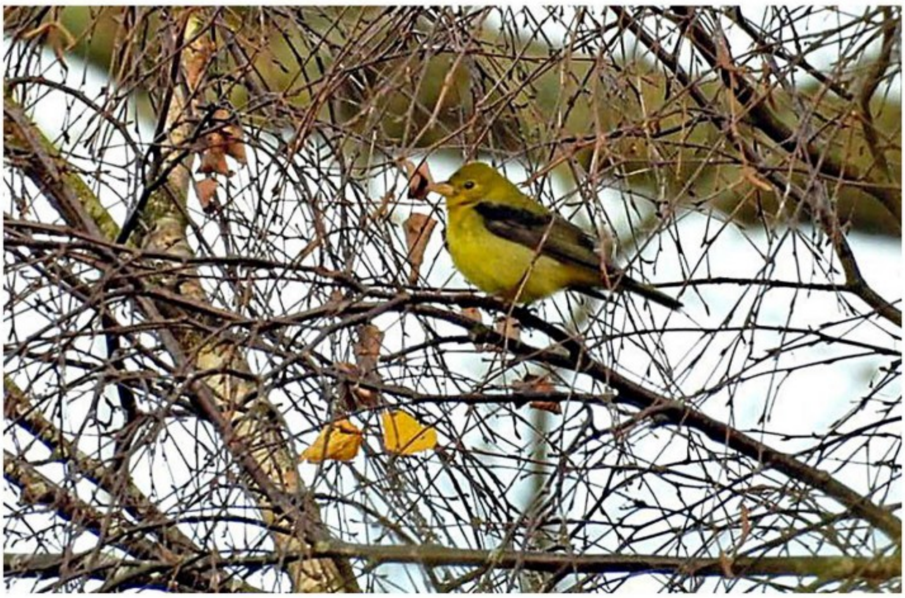
ANDREW JORDAN

Top: Azorean Yellow-legged Gull, Newlyn, Cornwall, 17 November

Right: Scarlet Tanager, Northowram, Halifax, West Yorkshire, 11th November

Below left: American Coot, Spiggie, Shetland, November

Above left: First-winter male Siberian Stonechat, Gibraltar Point, Lincolnshire, 16 November



HAZEL WISEMAN

Wandering eagle

One of the most exciting events for many of the country's birders, and particular listers, was the discovery of a dark-morph Booted Eagle, initially seen at Warburg BNR, Oxfordshire on 31 October, then relocated the next day at Remenham, Berkshire. The next day, the eagle was seen drifting into Oxfordshire airspace (and even into Buckinghamshire, briefly), delighting a range of county listers! This species is infamously not on The British List (yet), so it would be a welcome county tick for all who saw it!

It has been reasonably proposed that this Booted Eagle is the same dark-morph bird seen in spring in Cornwall among a movement of Red Kites. Where it has been in the intervening time is a mystery, as for now are its whereabouts since its multi-county tour. But it is presumably too late for migration (which most of its species would do in September into October).

North Ronaldsay, Orkney, continued its rich vein of form with a first-winter Eyebrowed Thrush (7th-9th), while a Brown Booby was photographed flying by the same island on 8th. An Azores Gull was at Newlyn, Cornwall, through most of the month.

Classic November rarities, included a smattering of Hume's Leaf Warblers, and half a dozen Pallid Swifts at various sites (including one on Islay, a first for Argyll). A female Pied Wheatear was at Seaford Head and Splash Point, East Sussex (9th to 17th). Penduline Tits were found at Wooslton Eyes, Cheshire, Titchwell, Norfolk, Priory CP, Bedfordshire, and Gwithian, Cornwall. Red-rumped Swallows were seen at seven sites, mostly on the east coast of England.

Notable influxes included exceptional numbers of Hawfinches (check a churchyard near you!), and big numbers of Little Auks, mainly on the North Sea coast, as is usually the case during influx years.

Will December turn out to be the new November? Find out in a couple of issues' time (next month is the UKBS review of 2024). BW

SOUTH WEST

Highlights

In association with Rare Bird Alert

Key potential transatlantic vagrants included a couple of (apparent) extremely rare subspecies: a Rough-legged Buzzard in Cornwall, probably of the North American subspecies 'Rough-legged Hawk', and a Red-necked Grebe at Portland, Dorset, of the American subspecies called Holboell's Red-necked Grebe.

AVON

CLEVEDON-WESTON-SUPER-MARE: The Blind Yeo held six Goosanders. Woodspring Bay had 14 Avocets. Uphill had two Sanderling and a Black Redstart. Sand Point logged 170 Curlews, a Jack Snipe, Shag (2nd), Wood Larks, five Firecrests, a Ring Ouzel (9th), Black Redstart, 50 Rock Pipits, a Snow Bunting, flyover Bramblings, Hawfinches and Redpolls, and 167 Siskins. Clevedon-Yeo held 23 Grey Plovers, 35 Ringed Plovers, a Merlin, two Crossbills and a Snow Bunting (9th).

SEVERNSIDE: There were three Brent Geese, two Whitefronts, five Common Scoters, two Goosanders, a Red-breasted Merganser, a few Avocets, six Bar-tailed Godwits, 200 Black-tailed Godwits, 220 Turnstones, 69 Knot, a few Jack Snipe, 200 Curlews, 1,500 Dunlin, an influx of Water Rails, 48 Kittiwakes (24th), a Caspian Gull, Leach's Petrel (25th), two Short-eared Owls, a Merlin, Ring Ouzel (20th), two Black Redstarts and five Water Pipits.

A Common Scoter visited Portbury Wharf (18th). Pilning Wetland had a Spotted Redshank and Greenshank. Five Purple Sandpipers returned to Battery Point in Portishead. Oldbury Power Station had a Hooded Crow (26th). Migrants included a Wood Lark, 12 Bramblings, 13 Redpolls and a Crossbill. An influx of Hawfinches included 11 over Aust.

THE RESERVOIRS: Chew had a Pink-footed Goose (5th), four Red-crested Pochards, two Ring-necked Ducks, three Scaup, 45 Goldeneyes, nine Goosanders, a Knot, Dunlin, Jack Snipe, 535 Cormorants, four Water Rails, the long-staying Glossy Ibis, a Bittern, Spoonbill, 22 Herons, 28 Cattle Egrets, 80 Little Egrets, 50 Great White Egrets, six Marsh Harriers, 12 Bearded Tits and 5,000 Starlings.

OTHER SITES: Mandarins were at Keynsham and Yate. Twelve Goosanders were at Coopers Lake. Golden Plovers were at Bristol Airport (26), Odd Down at Bath (20), and Saltford (18). Bristol had several Woodcocks and Water Rails, a Short-eared Owl, with another at Chipping Sodbury, a Black Redstart in Little Stoke, and growing numbers of Firecrests. A Merlin was at Keynsham.

Saltford produced nine Jack Snipe, a Water Rail and 13 Redpolls. Portishead logged 67 Ravens. The Pied Wagtail roost in Bath held 180 birds. Marshfield had 12 Corn Buntings and 35 Yellowhammers. Hawfinches were at several sites. Yatton had a Black Redstart (29th) and Little Bunting (6th).

Jane Cumming

CORNWALL

WEST CORNWALL: Lizard Point had a Lapland Bunting, Snow Bunting and six Swallows (1st). Lizard Village had a Rose-coloured Starling (1st-16th) and Serin (2nd). Penzance had a Snow Bunting for most of the month, Bonaparte's Gull (6th-17th), 64 Purple Sandpipers (25th) and a Swallow (24th). Hayle had a Spoonbill, four Pinkfeet (1st-14th), with two birds remaining (to 30th), a Green-winged Teal (3rd-27th), Avocet (6th-19th), Egyptian Goose (14th), Spotted Redshank (14th-28th) and Caspian Gull (24th).

Marazion had two Great White Egrets (3rd), a Long-tailed Duck (10th) and Bonaparte's Gull (24th). A Great White Egret at Stithians Reservoir was joined by a Scaup (23rd-29th). Pendeen had a Pallas's Warbler (2nd), Long-tailed Duck (4th), Siberian Chiffchaff (5th), Hume's Warbler (10th-11th), Common/Pallid Swift (12th), Richard's Pipit (13th), four Velvet Scoters (20th) and a Little Auk (22nd). Kynance Cove had a Snow Bunting (2nd-3rd) and Lapland Bunting (10th). A Swift species was over St. Just (7th).

Bonaparte's Gull, Penzance, Cornwall, 17 November

ANDREW JORDAN

Snow Bunting, Long Rock, Cornwall, 17 November

ANDREW JORDAN

A Rough-legged Buzzard was around Polgigga and Skewjack (3rd-9th). Polgigga also had a Turtle Dove (3rd-6th), two Hawfinches (4th) and a Red-backed Shrike (13th). Skewjack had a Dusky Warbler (10th). Gwithian had a Snow Bunting (6th), a Spotted Redshank and Penduline Tit (13th) and two Egyptian Geese (14th). Twelve Snow Buntings flew into Perranuthnoe (7th). An Azores Gull remained at Newlyn. A Whooper Swan was at Croft Pascoe (30th). A possible White-billed Diver was off St. Ives (20th).

CENTRAL AND NORTH CORNWALL: A Crane was at Winnard's Perch (1st). Wadebridge had 13 Mandarins (18th) and 37 Cattle Egrets (27th). Walmsley had eight Barnacle Geese and a Great White Egret (1st). Five Snow Buntings were on Pentire Point (2nd). Maer Lake had seven Whooper Swans (13th) and six Barnacle Geese (3rd). A Turtle Dove was in a St. Merryn garden (4th-10th). Falmouth had a Wood Lark (5th) and possible Ross's Gull (21st).

Tresemple Pool had six Whooper Swans (12th) and a Pink-footed Goose (8th-20th). An Osprey was on the Camel Estuary (7th). A Swift species was over Crackington Haven (8th). Par Sands had a Surf Scoter (8th-12th) and 10 Eiders (26th). A Scaup was on Par Pool (10th-14th). A Long-tailed Duck was at Newquay (10th-28th). A Black-winged Stilt was at Porthilly (15th). A Little Auk was in Gerrans Bay (26th), when a Quail was at Mawgan Smith (26th).

SE CORNWALL: Four Egyptian Geese were on Calstock wetlands (2nd). A Hawfinch was in Mount Edgcumbe CP (12th). Four Black-necked Grebes were at Torpoint (17th-20th). Two Spoonbills were at Anthony (20th). There were 130 Avocets at Saltash (20th).

Deena Sharp

DEVON

HIGHLIGHTS: Cadover Bridge had a Pallid Harrier (2nd-10th) and Hen Harrier (7th). Bowling Green Marsh had a Long-billed Dowitcher (1st-28th), four Spotted Redshanks, and a Scaup (19th-22nd). Northam Burrows CP had a White-rumped Sandpiper (2nd-10th). Fremington Quay had a Glossy Ibis (3rd-30th), Spotted Redshank, and Spoonbill (8th). A Kentish Plover was at Bantham (11th).

Beesands Ley had a Lesser Scaup (4th-22nd) and one or two Ring-necked Ducks (11th-30th). Two Ring-necked Ducks and a Red-crested Pochard were at Portworthy (7th-10th). A Long-billed Dowitcher was at Powderham (14th). Several Great Shearwaters flew past Shoalstone Point (23rd). Lundy had a Richard's Pipit (12th), Dartford Warbler (12th) and Pallid Swift (16th).

ISLES OF SCILLY

HIGHLIGHTS: Two Cattle Egrets and three Great White Egrets roamed the islands. Three Spoonbills roosted near Samson. A few Hawfinches included five on St Agnes (1st). Good numbers of Yellow-browed Warblers were noted, mainly on St Mary's. There were many Black Redstarts, with a scattering of Firecrest and Siberian Chiffchaffs. Serins were at New Grimsby, Tresco (1st-2nd and 7th), Carn Friars (2nd) and near the Airport (two, 14th-17th).

The first Barn Owl for many years was near Longstone and Parting Carn (to 30th). A Great Spotted Woodpecker was in the Carn Friars/Holy Vale area. Twelve Whooper Swans commuted between Tresco and Bryher. Eight Pinkfeet remained in the Pelistry area. Several eastern-type Lesser Whitethroats were noted. A Red-rumped Swallow was over Bryher and St Mary's (1st-2nd). A Richard's Pipit flew over Green Farm and St Agnes (1st). A Lesser Yellowlegs was on Tresco (1st-3rd).

A Radde's Warbler was at Mount Todden (1st-2nd). A Spotted Crake was in Lower Moors (1st). Two Goldeneyes were on Tresco (1st-7th). A few Cory's Shearwaters included our latest ever seen, with 60 off the Western Rocks (16th). Two Little Buntings were at Sunnyside (2nd-9th), with one (to 13th). A Barnacle Goose was at Higher Town, St Martin's (3rd- 9th). A Hoopoe was on Bryher (4th, and 6th-7th). The Osprey remained (to 14th). A Bullfinch was at Longstone (4th).

The Wilson's Snipe was again in Lower Moors (5th-6th), along with six Jack Snipe and a Green Sandpiper. A Red-breasted Flycatcher was at Porth Hellick (6th-11th). Seven Great Shearwaters were seen from the Scillonian (8th). Two Richard's Pipits flew over High Lanes, with others near the Airport (9th) and at Porth Hellick (16th). A Lapland Bunting was on St Martin's (10th).

Desert Wheatear, Beachy Head, East Sussex, 6 November

ANDREW JORDAN

A Little Bunting was on St Agnes (11th). Ring Ouzels were at Peninnis (two on 11th), Mount Todden (13th) and Porth Hellick (22nd-23rd). A Short-eared Owl was on St Agnes (13th). Dusky Warblers were at Porth Hellick (16th) and Higher Moors (to 30th). The Western Rocks logged a Great Shearwater, 130 Purple Sandpipers and six Yellow-legged Gulls (16th). A Blyth's Pipit was on St Agnes (16th-17th). A Hen Harrier toured the islands (from 17th). Two Greylags flew over St Mary's (21st). Three Great Shearwaters were off Giant's Castle (23rd). A Little Bunting was at Content (24th), with it, or another, at Porth Hellick (26th). A Little Auk was at Salakee (27th).
Will Wagstaff

SOMERSET

HIGHLIGHTS: Westhay Moor had a Glossy Ibis and Cattle Egrets. Shapwick Heath had a Ring-necked Duck (2nd-29th), Scaup (12th) and two Whooper Swans (18th). Ham Wall had a Ring-necked Duck (4th-17th) and Glossy Ibis (15th-30th). A Green-winged Teal was at Catcott Lows (17th-18th). Steart had a Pectoral Sandpiper (2nd-8th), Siberian Chiffchaff (2nd), and one or two Little Stints (4th-8th). The Kentish Plover remained around Burnham-on-Sea (10th-30th), with a Leach's Storm Petrel and Grey Phalarope there (26th). A Purple Heron was at Sharpham (10th).

WILTSHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: The floods at Eysey and Castle Eaton produced a Lesser Yellowlegs, Pectoral Sandpiper, Ruff, Spotted Redshank, five Whooper Swans, a Black-tailed Godwit, Green Sandpiper, Dunlin and large numbers of Golden Plovers. The Water Park had a Glossy Ibis and Purple Heron. Five Cranes flew over Corsham, with a Spoonbill over Trowbridge. Seven Whooper Swans were at Langford Lakes. There were 14 records of Great White Egret. A Black Redstart was at Salisbury. Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers were at Franchises Wood and Avebury. A Ring Ouzel was at Tockenham. A Yellow-browed Warbler was at Bradford-on-Avon.
Rob Turner

SOUTH EAST

Highlights

In association with Rare Bird Alert

A dark-morph Booted Eagle was seen in counties rarely mentioned in the same sentence as extremely rare birds: Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire. Meanwhile, in East Sussex, there were both Pied Wheatear at Seaford Head and Desert Wheatear at Beachy Head.

BEDFORDSHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: The Green-winged Teal was seen again at Broom GP (10th). South Quarry, Broom had a Great Northern Diver (14th-15th) and Kittiwake (19th). There were 26 Hawfinches at Warden Warren (7th).
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BERKSHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: A Booted Eagle was at Remenham Hill (1st-2nd). Pangbourne had a Merlin (2nd). Common Scoters were at Lower Farm GP (2nd) and Padworth Lane GP (14th). Hawfinches included four at Remenham Hill (3rd), one at Moatlands GP (10th), two at Woosehill (11th) and 12 at Basildon Park (16th). Woosehill also had a Brent Goose (3rd) and Yellow-browed Warbler (12th).

An Avocet was at Fobney Meadow (5th-16th). Black Redstarts were at Queen Mother Reservoir (9th) and Sulhampstead (27th). Moor Green Lakes had a Hen Harrier (13th). Smew were at Jubilee River (from 7th) and Lavell's Lake (16th). Ten Firecrests were at Maiden Erlegh Lake (16th).
Elaine Charlson

HAMPSHIRE

BLASHFORD LAKES: Ibsley Water had the long-staying Red-crested Pochard and Black-necked Grebe, a Ruff (12th-15th), three Yellow-legged Gulls, two Kittiwakes (23rd) and two Great White Egrets. A Green-winged Teal was at Avon Causeway (17th). Great White Egrets were at Ringwood (19th), Avon Causeway (21st) and Harbridge (25th).

LANGSTONE HARBOUR: There were five Whooper Swans (28th), a Black-necked Grebe and Great Northern Diver. Farlington had two Great White Egrets, two Short-eared Owls and two Water Pipits. Four Cattle Egrets were at Warblington (15th). Hayling Island had a Red-necked Grebe (from 27th), Slavonian Grebe (24th and 28th), two Black-necked Grebes (9th-14th), two Little Gulls (23rd), with one (27th), Black-throated Divers (23rd and 28th), five Great Northern Divers, a Black Redstart (3rd) and Snow Bunting (1st-3rd).

LYMINGTON-KEYHAVEN: Milford-on-Sea had a Leach's Petrel (23rd), two Sooty Shearwaters, a Cory's Shearwater, Little Auk, two Little Gulls, 50 Kittiwakes and a Great Northern Diver (24th), and two Velvet Scoters (25th). Between Keyhaven and Normandy, there was a Long-tailed Duck (15th-20th), Jack Snipe (17th), five Spotted Redshanks, a Great Northern Diver (25th), 15 Spoonbills, a Great White Egret (1st), Short-eared Owl (15th), Ring Ouzel (8th), Yellow-browed Warbler (2nd) and Water Pipits (5th, 17th and 28th).

TITCHFIELD HAVEN-WARSASH: Titchfield Haven had one or two Spoonbills (9th-17th), a Hen Harrier (14th), Siberian Chiffchaff (13th) and Water Pipit (17th). Three Glossy Ibises remained along the canal path, where there was also a late Whinchat (9th). A Lapland Bunting was at Hill Head (16th). Offshore, there were 40 Eiders, two Common Scoters, Slavonian Grebes (9th and 18th) and Red-throated Divers (1st and 4th). A Merlin and Short-eared Owl were over the Solent (1st). Two Black Redstarts were on the seafront (4th-8th). A Hen Harrier and Siberian Chiffchaff were at Chilling (2nd). A Spotted Redshank was at Bunny Meadows (8th).

OTHER SITES: Weston Shore had a Red-necked Grebe (from 26th) and Slavonian Grebe (from 10th). Stokes Bay had a Leach's Petrel (24th), 220 Kittiwakes, seven Little Gulls and a Velvet Scoter. Gilkicker Point had 85 Kittiwakes and two Little Gulls (23rd). Lepe had a Velvet Scoter (27th), 19 Kittiwakes (24th), Great Northern Divers, Red-throated Divers, a Great White Egret (1st and 3rd), Hen Harrier (2nd), Short-eared Owl (1st) and Black Redstarts (2nd, 9th). A Spoonbill flew over Tweseldown (13th).

Great White Egrets were widespread. A Cattle Egret was at Testwood Lakes (9th). Hen Harriers were at Latchmore Bottom (9th), Tweseldown (11th) and Bossington (22nd). A Short-eared Owl was at Middle Wallop (9th). A Hoopoe was at Nursling (18th). A Yellow-browed Warbler was at Burley (3rd). There were two Ring Ouzels at Pigeon House Farm (5th-10th) and one at Tweseldown (4th). Four Black Redstarts were at Daedalus Airfield, with a few singles elsewhere. A late Wheatear was at Centurion Business Park (7th).
Tom Jordan

HERTFORDSHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: Ferruginous Ducks were at Troy Mill Lake (17th-18th), Stocker's Lake/Bury Lake (two, 19th-22nd) and West Hyde GP (30th). Four Black-necked Grebes were at Troy Mill Lake. Wilstone Reservoir had a Garganey (to 10th) and Little Gull (6th). Smew were at Stanstead Innings (22nd) and Amwell (30th). A Common Scoter was at Startop's End Reservoir (from 22nd). There were 25 Hawfinches at Aldbury (18th). A Black Redstart was at Stanborough GP (9th). A late House Martin was at Clothall Common (18th).
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KENT

HIGHLIGHTS: A Rose-coloured Starling was at St Margaret's-at-Cliffe (1st-10th), with a Serin there (9th). A Pallas's Warbler was at Ramsgate (6th-9th). Cliffe Pools had a Long-billed Dowitcher (5th) and Spotted Redshank. Seasalter had a Black Brant and Leach's Petrel (10th). Worth Marsh had a Smew (12th) and Grey Phalarope (23rd). Foreness Point had a Richard's Pipit (14th-18th) and Dartford Warbler (17th).

A Grey Phalarope was at Sandwich Bay (21st). Dungeness NNR had four Sabine's Gulls (23rd), a Leach's Petrel (24th), and a Leach's Petrel, five Sooty Shearwaters and a Velvet Scoter (25th). Hythe (23rd), had two Leach's Petrels, a Sooty Shearwater and two Long-tailed Ducks. A Hoopoe was at Ashford (25th).

SURREY

HIGHLIGHTS: A Little Bunting was ringed at Tice's Meadow (22nd). A Bearded Tit was at Shalford Water Meadows (3rd-6th). Papercourt Water Meadows had four Red-crested Pochards (7th-10th). Island Barn Reservoir had a Red-breasted Merganser and Caspian Gull (13th). Holmethorpe Sand Pits had a Bittern (15th) and Water Pipit (18th-30th). A Black Redstart was in a Weybourne garden (15th-20th). Frensham Great Pond had a Brent Goose (17th) and Little Gull (23rd).

Five Russian Whitefronts were at Newchapel (17th). A Hen Harrier was at Thursley Common (20th-21st). Hawfinches were at Effingham Forest (30+), Cranleigh, Godstone, Ashstead, Headley (30+), Busbridge, Shalford, Leith Hill, Albury, Tice's Meadow, Worplesdon, Capel, Newdigate, Headley Heath (30+ on 8th), Beare Green, Puttenham and Netley Heath.

SUSSEX

EAST SUSSEX: The Desert Wheatear remained around Beachy Head (1st-6th). A Pied Wheatear was at Seaford Head (9th-10th) and Splash Point (11th-15th), with up to three Black Redstarts at the latter. Three Sabine's Gulls were at Birling Gap and one at Rottingdean (24th). A Stone Curlew was at Tide Mills (2nd). A Richard's Pipit was at West Rise Marsh (3rd-4th).

WEST SUSSEX: A Hoopoe was at Felpham (13th). Two Sabine's Gulls passed Worthing (24th). A Black-necked Grebe was at Yapton (6th-10th), with two at East Head (10th-13th). Hen Harriers were at The Burgh (10th-29th) and Chantry Hill (13th). Black Redstarts were at Elmer, Goodwood, Selsey Bill (four), Chichester, Lancing, Littlehampton, Climping, Eartham Wood and Pagham Harbour. Slavonian Grebes were at Elmer (9th), East Head (13th), Church Norton (three), Selsey Bill and Thorney Island.

Purple Sandpipers were at Shoreham-by-Sea (17th-25th) and Medmerry (18th). Two Russian Whitefronts were at Amberley Wild Brooks (18th-29th). Short-eared Owls were at Climping (1st) and Thorney Island (26th). A Siberian Chiffchaff was at Elmer (28th). Hawfinches were widespread, with 78 at Rewell Wood (17th).

EAST ANGLIA

Highlights

In association with Rare Bird Alert

The rarest bird in the region was, once more, the drake Canvassback at Abberton Reservoir, Essex. Norfolk held the regular Pallid Harrier at Warham Greens, Hume's Leaf Warbler at Titchwell, and the regular Long-billed Dowitcher at Cley NWT, plus a female Desert Wheatear at Winterton. There were many reports of Little Auk.

CAMBRIDGESHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: A Lesser Scaup was at Barleycroft Lake (from 10th). Grafham Water had a Green-winged Teal (to 13th), one or two Black-necked Grebes (from 13th), a Long-tailed Duck (22nd) and Great Northern Diver (29th-30th). Another Great Northern Diver was on Brampton East Pit (from 4th). A Glaucous Gull was at Cottenham Long Drove (29th-30th). A Tundra Bean Goose was at Kingfishers Bridge (from 27th). Yellow-browed Warblers were at Ferry Meadows CP and Witcham (1st). A Ring Ouzel was at Clopton (4th). A Black Redstart was at Edington (14th-15th).

Robin Chittenden. For the latest bird news please phone 09068 700 245. Calls to 09068 700 245 cost 65p per minute plus your telephone company access charge. Service provided by Birdline East Anglia for enquiries please call 07941 333 970. www.birdlineeastanglia.co.uk

ESSEX

HIGHLIGHTS: Abberton Reservoir had a Canvasback, Lesser Scaup (4th), six Black-necked Grebes, two Slavonian Grebes (28th), and a Garganey (to 8th). A Long-billed Dowitcher was at Rainham Marshes (21st). The Naze had Pallas's Warblers (3rd-4th and 30th), a Shorelark (27th-28th), Black-throated Diver (2nd), three Slavonian Grebes, and a Little Auk (22nd). Canvey Point had Leach's Petrels (4th and 19th), a Black-throated Diver (21st), and a Little Auk (19th), with two (30th).

Gunners Park had a Grey Phalarope (20th) and Slavonian Grebes (16th and 21st). King George V Reservoir had Great Northern Divers (18th-19th and 28th), up to three Black-necked Grebes, and a Smew (21st). Two Slavonian Grebes were at Hanningfield Reservoir (11th-13th), with singles recorded at Dovercourt (1st) and East Tilbury (9th).

Black-necked Grebes were at Glen Faba (15th-17th), Goldhanger (11th-18th) and Old Hall Marshes (22nd). Two Black-throated Divers and two Slavonian Grebes were at Tollesbury Fleet (30th). West Mersea had two Black Brants, a Red-necked Grebe (20th), Black-necked Grebe (4th), Great Northern Diver (21st) and Black-throated Diver (28th).

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NORFOLK

HIGHLIGHTS: A Desert Wheatear was at Winterton (13th-15th). Titchwell had a Penduline Tit (26th-27th) and Hume's Warbler (29th-30th). Pallas's Warblers were at Waxham (3rd) and Holkham Pines (13th). A Little Bunting was between Old Hunstanton and Holme (4th-7th). A Rose-coloured Starling was near Erpingham (20th-22nd). A Hoopoe was at Haddiscoe (4th). Richard's Pipits were at Weybourne Camp (5th) and Winterton (5th). A Black-throated Diver was on the pits at Snettisham (20th-22nd).

Shore Larks included four at Thornham Harbour (4th), up to eight at Holme Dunes (17th and 28th-29th), up to seven Old Hunstanton (1st-2nd and 26th), four at Burnham Overy Dunes (4th), singles at Cley Marshes (12th) and Breydon Water (22nd), and up to six at Holkham Gap. The Pallid Harrier was seen regularly at Warham Greens, and once at North Point Pools. A Black Kite flew over Great Yarmouth (4th). A Long-eared Owl was at Gorleston (12th). One or two Glossy Ibises were at Breydon Water (2nd-8th and 28th).

The Long-billed Dowitcher was Cley Marshes (1st-18th, and from 24th), and at Titchwell (20th). An American Golden Plover was at Breydon Water (3rd and 15th). An American Wigeon was at Welney (16th-18th and 23rd), with a Green-winged Teal there intermittently (to 23rd). Cory's Shearwaters passed Winterton and Sheringham (12th). Black Guillemots were off Sheringham (12th), Trimmingham (12th), Kelling (20th) and Overstrand (27th).

NOA HOLME BIRD OBSERVATORY: Maxima included 27 Cattle Egrets, 14 Goldeneyes, two Jack Snipe, 27 Bearded Tits, 19 Snow Buntings, 14 Whooper Swans, three Woodcocks, 200 Fieldfares, four Bramblings, two Redpolls, 15 Siskins, 112 Eiders, two Long-tailed Ducks, 31 Gannets, two Slavonian Grebes, two Mistle Thrushes, 31 Redwings, four Rock Pipits, two Hawfinches, 615 Common Scoters, 16 Red-throated Divers, 40 Red-breasted Mergansers, four Stonechats, 18 Goosanders, 200 Golden Plovers, three Pomarine Skuas, three Great Skuas, four Guillemots, 106 Kittiwakes, 24 Little Gulls, eight Velvet Scoters, four Little Auks, two Ravens, and a Ruff, Merlin, Peregrine, Spoonbill, Black-throated Diver, Black-necked Grebe, Barn Owl, Greenshank, Great Northern Diver, Razorbill, Chiffchaff, Blackcap, Kingfisher, Shag, Red-necked Grebe, Yellow-browed Warbler, Water Pipit, Hen Harrier, Short-eared Owl, and Sooty Shearwater.

Little Auk, Cley, Norfolk, 19 November

STEVE GANTLETT

NOA REDWELL MARSH: Highlights included a Kingfisher, 152 Teal, 16 Cattle Egrets, two Black-tailed Godwits, a Cetti's Warbler, two Jays and a Bullfinch.

CLEY AREA: Highlights included eight Velvet Scoters, five Whooper Swans, two Goldeneyes, a Black-throated Diver, Black Redstart, Firecrest, two Hen Harriers, three Water Pipits, 20 Twite, a Peregrine, a Northern-race Peregrine, 12 Snow Buntings, a Hawfinch, three Bramblings, three Woodcocks, Pomarine Skuas, two Grey Phalaropes, five Little Auks, a Purple Sandpiper, two Great Skuas, a Jack Snipe, five Little Auks, a Slavonian Grebe and 17 Pintails.

Sophie Barker (www.noa.org.uk) and Robin Chittenden. For the latest bird news please phone 09068 700 245. Calls to 09068 700 245 cost 65p per minute plus your telephone company access charge. Service provided by Birdline East Anglia for enquiries please call 07941 333 970. www.birdlineeastanglia.co.uk

SUFFOLK

HIGHLIGHTS: A presumed Amur Stonechat was at Trimley Marshes (4th-11th), with a Rough-legged Buzzard there (10th). Serins were at Corton Old Sewage Works (5th-6th) and Beach Farm, Benacre (6th). A Red-rumped Swallow was at Landguard (18th). A Hoopoe was at Bungay (7th). Another ranged between Thorpeness, Sizewell and Minsmere (16th-21st). A Great Grey Shrike was caught on a camera trap at Carleton Marshes. A Hooded Crow was at Snape Wetlands (19th-26th).

Seven Waxwings flew over Melton (28th), with three over Orford (30th). Three Shore Larks were at Hollesley Marshes (2nd), with two at Kessingland Sluice (21st-26th). A Surf Scoter flew past Sizewell (3rd). Southwold had a Leach's Petrel (2nd) and Sabine's Gull (12th). Minsmere had a Green-winged Teal (21st) and Grey Phalarope (8th-9th). A Glaucous Gull was off Thorpeness and Sizewell (22nd). A Black-throated Diver was off Shotley Marina (28th).

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MIDLANDS

Highlights

In association with

The region held the 'regular' Lesser Scaup and Ferruginous Ducks. In common with most areas in the southern half of Great Britain, Hawfinches featured prominently this month, flying through or settling at many sites in the region.

DERBYSHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: Ogston Reservoir had a superb month with four Bearded Tits found (5th) and eight the following day, plus a Grey Plover (5th), a Knot (6th), and one observer had a Shore Lark (7th) with a flock of Sky Larks! Carsington Water struck back with a female Ring-necked Duck (17th), refound a week later and staying until month's end. Bearded Tits featured elsewhere with Carr Vale NR having two (8th) and Poolsbrook Marsh the same (9th), with a male at Carr Vale for several days intermittently. A Rock Pipit also dropped in briefly there (21st). Snow Buntings were at Axe Edge Moor (8th), Foremark Reservoir (12th) and Kinder Low (13th). A first-winter male Scaup was at Melbourne Pool (1st-19th), while nearby at Foremark Reservoir two Slavonian Grebes were found (7th), with one staying to 12th. Barrow GP had three Knot (9th), and Middleton Moor Lagoons one (8th).

A Great Grey Shrike was on Leash Fen (13th). Corbar Woods and Nether Padley both had Black Redstart (3rd & 5th) while Willington GP had maxima of 12 Cattle Egrets and 12 Great White Egrets, plus three White-fronted Geese (20th).

ASTON ON TRENT GP/WITCH'S OAK: Highlights included Marsh Harrier and two Chiffchaffs (10th).

BARROW GP: Best sightings were 25 Egyptian Geese (2nd), Marsh Harrier, Sanderling (9th), Dunlin (9th), two Redshanks (9th), Green Sandpiper and three Chiffchaffs (17th).

BREASTON NR: There were 280 Pink-footed Geese (10th), Golden Plover (4th), and the first autumn Woodcock (30th).

CARR VALE NR: There were 31 Whooper Swans and 1,265 Pink-footed Geese (11th), Red Kite, Merlin (21st), 23 Red-legged Partridges (9th), six Grey Partridges (9th), up to 16 Water Rails, Golden Plover, Dunlin (30th), Redshank (19th), Caspian Gull (8th), Crossbill (6th) and Hawfinch (29th).

CARSINGTON WATER: Highlights were Whooper Swan, Pink-footed Goose, 10 Shelducks (14th), Pintail, Golden Plover, Dunlin, two Jack Snipe (18th), Woodcock, Redshank, Yellow-legged Gull, Caspian Gull, two Chiffchaffs (28th), Willow Tit, Brambling, Hawfinch and 28 Reed Buntings (1st).

DRAKELOW NR: There were 16 Shovelera (18th), three Chiffchaffs (5th) and 1,900 Jackdaws (30th).

FOREMARK RESERVOIR: There were four Whooper Swans (11th), 20 Goosanders (11th), Green Sandpiper (9th) and two Yellow-legged Gulls (10th).

Caspian Gull, Clumber Park NT, Notts, November

PHIL PALMER

HIGH BRIDGE GP: Highlights were Pintail (16th), Marsh Harrier, Dunlin, Redshank, Green Sandpiper, Mediterranean Gull (5th), Caspian Gull and two Chiffchaffs (30th).

MIDDLETON MOOR LAGOONS: There were two Whooper Swans (16th), Pintail (3rd), Red Kite, Golden Plover, two Dunlin (15th), Woodcock and Yellow-legged Gull.

OGSTON RESERVOIR: Highlights were six Whooper Swans (9th), 27 Mandarin (5th), Pintail, Golden Plover (12th), Dunlin, two Black-tailed Godwits (3rd), four Redshanks (9th-10th), Yellow-legged Gull, Caspian Gull, Brambling and Hawfinch.

PLEASLEY COLLIERY: There was a Yellow-legged Gull (2nd) and a Caspian Gull (16th).

WILLINGTON GP: Best birds of the month were Pintail, Marsh Harrier, six Water Rails (13th), Dunlin, Jack Snipe (16th), Black-tailed Godwit (22nd), Redshank, Green Sandpiper, Mediterranean Gull (5th), Yellow-legged Gull, Caspian Gull, Kittiwake (22nd), Chiffchaff and Hawfinch (17th).

GLOUCESTERSHIRE

COTSWOLDS: Cleeve Hill had a Dartford Warbler (16th), two Short-eared Owls, and a late Swallow (7th). Cotswold Lakes had 16 Egyptian Geese, 113 Red-crested Pochards, a Goldeneye, 12 Goosanders, four Green Sandpipers, three Great White Egrets and two Marsh Harriers. Merlins were at Chavenage Lane and Hawling. Two Firecrests were at Amberley (4th) and one at Calmsden (16th). Four Bewick's Swans flew over Stroud (26th). A Goosander and Great White Egret were at Dowdeswell Reservoir (7th). A Great White Egret was at Chedworth. Great Rissington had 600 Golden Plovers.

FOREST OF DEAN: There were 29 Goosanders at Woorgreens and two at Soudley Ponds. Flaxley Pool had 25 Little Grebes. Crossbills included 13 at May Hill.

LOWER SEVERN VALE: Berkeley Shore had a Snow Bunting (15th) and 11 Turnstones. A Common Scoter was between Slimbridge and Purton (8th-12th). The same area had a Richard's Pipit (13th) and Common Sandpiper. A Hen Harrier and Swallow were at Lydney New Grounds (20th). The Frampton Pools and Saul Warth area logged a Goldeneye, Goosander, Green Sandpiper, Common Sandpiper, Great White Egret, Marsh Harrier, Firecrest, Wheatear (to 19th), two Hawfinches and a Corn Bunting (6th).

Sharpness had two Black Redstarts (from 9th), a Common Scoter (20th) and two Common Sandpipers. Hawfinches were at Epney and Halmore. Epney also had a Common Sandpiper. A Jack Snipe was at Walmore Common. Sixteen Egyptian Geese were at Westbury.

SLIMBRIDGE WWT: There was a Bearded Tit (2nd and 10th-11th), White-rumped Sandpiper (from 4th), Green-winged Teal (11th, and from 18th), 17 Bewick's Swans, seven dark-bellied Brent Geese, 31 Whitefronts, a Pink-footed Goose of unknown origin, a Red-breasted Merganser, three Common Scoters (19th), a Goldeneye, Spoonbill, 22 Cattle Egrets, two Great White Egrets, a Bittern, four Avocets, 1,500 Golden Plovers, two Grey Plovers, a Ringed Plover, 880 Black-tailed Godwits, five Spotted Redshanks, 30 Ruff, a Little Stint, Turnstone, Mediterranean Gull, Merlin, Firecrest and Hawfinch.

UPPER SEVERN VALE: A Black Redstart was at Gloucester Cathedral (17th). Coombe Hill Meadows had 24 Egyptian Geese, four Pochards, two Black-tailed Godwits, a Woodcock, 15 Dunlin, two Ruff, four Kittiwakes (19th), a Bittern, 15 Cattle Egrets, a Great White Egret, three Green Sandpipers and a Marsh Harrier. Ashleworth Ham had an Osprey (16th), two Goosanders, a Woodcock, three Jack Snipe, a Great White Egret and Marsh Harrier. A Hawfinch flew over Charlton Kings.
Andy Jayne (01452 506 502)

LEICESTERSHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: Eyebrook Reservoir had a Scaup (8th), Brent Goose (12th), Smew (29th-30th) and two Black-necked Grebes (30th). A Long-tailed Duck was at Thornton Reservoir (13th-20th). Caspian Gulls were at Cropston Reservoir (8th-26th), with two (13th), Groby Pool (17th) and Watermead CP (10th-21st). Stanford Reservoir had a Caspian Gull (9th), with two (18th), and a Kittiwake.

Great White Egret, Clumber Park NT, Notts, November

PHIL PALMER

Spoonbill, Slimbridge, Goucestershire, 20 November

ANDREW JORDAN

A Yellow-browed Warbler was in a Gilmorton garden (7th). Two Water Pipits were at Shenton Wetlands (11th). Hawfinches were at Croft Hill, Shenton, Timberwood Hill, Aylestone, Mountsorrel, Groby, Warren Lane GP, Sawley Bridge Marina, Grimston, Warren Hills, Bradgate Park, Whetstone, Thornton, Woodhouse Eaves and Hinckley.

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: A Glossy Ibis spent the month at Earls Barton GP. A Hen Harrier was there (1st-12th), with others (5th and 14th). Others were near Brixworth (1st), Ashton and Bozenham Mill (7th), Staverton (10th), Harrington Airfield (7th), between Cottesbrooke and Hanging Houghton (11th) and over Wellingborough (29th).

A Brent Goose was at Clifford Hill GP (4th). A Black Redstart was at Braunston (4th-6th). A Bewick's Swan visited Stanford Reservoir (28th).

Yellow-browed Warblers were at Kettering (5th) and near Barton Seagrave (7th). One or two Bearded Tits were at Stanwick GP (from 5th). Seven Kittiwakes were at Pitsford Reservoir (18th), with singles at Stanford Reservoir (18th) and Boddington Reservoir (19th). A Great Northern Diver was at Clifford Hill GP (25th-26th) with it, or another, at Pitsford (26th-31st). Eight Cattle Egrets were at Ditchford GP and Stanwick GP, with three at Ringstead GP and Chacombe, and one at Thrapston GP.

BLATHERWYCKE LAKE: There were eight Whooper Swans, a Common Scoter, Scaup and Pintail. Two Hawfinches were noted, with eight in the adjacent churchyard.

BODDINGTON RESERVOIR: There were nine Hawfinches, five Caspian Gulls, 12 Yellow-legged Gulls, three Mediterranean Gulls, a Ring Ouzel and nine Golden Plovers.

CLIFFORD HILL GP: There were seven Whoopers Swans, five Avocets, a Knot, three Great White Egrets, a Yellow-legged Gull and a Short-eared Owl.

DAVENTRY CP: There was a Caspian Gull, three Mediterranean Gulls, 90 Golden Plovers, a Great White Egret, two Jack Snipe and 32 Snipe.

EARLS BARTON GP: There were two Marsh Harriers, a Pink-footed Goose, Whooper Swan, six Pintails, eight Great White Egrets, a Peregrine, Yellow-legged Gull, 300 Golden Plovers, 50 Snipe, a Bar-tailed Godwit, Grey Plover, Turnstone, Common Sandpiper, Jack Snipe and three Green Sandpipers.

HARRINGTON AIRFIELD: There was a Short-eared Owl, Merlin, 80 Golden Plovers and three Hawfinches.

PITSFORD RESERVOIR: There were four Whooper Swans, 20 Pinkfeet, a Pintail, 48 Snipe, a Caspian Gull, Yellow-legged Gull and Green Sandpiper.

STANFORD RESERVOIR: There were seven Whooper Swans, a Pintail, Pink-footed Goose, two Great White Egrets, a Short-eared Owl, two Hawfinches, Peregrine, three Mediterranean Gulls and two Caspian Gulls.

STANWICK GP: There were two Bitterns, a Pink-footed Goose, Pintail and two Redshanks.

THRAPSTON GP: There was a Bittern, 18 Pinkfeet, nine Great White Egrets and a Green Sandpiper.

OTHER SITES: Ditchford GP had a Knot and five Dunlin. Hollowell Reservoir had a Mediterranean Gull, two Caspian Gulls and a Crossbill. Hawfinches were at eight sites. Pinkfeet included 30 over Deene, 55 over Moulton, 63 over Oundle and seven over Maidwell. Merlins visited Lilbourne Meadows and Hanging Houghton. Two Short-eared Owls were at Maidwell and one at Nobottle.

Bob Bullock (01604 627 262)

RUTLAND

HIGHLIGHTS: Rutland Water had six Bewick's Swans (30th), eight Whooper Swans (8th and 12th), two Cattle Egrets (16th-17th) and a Great Grey Shrike (10th). Hawfinches were at Clipsham (1st) and Exton Park (3rd), with two over Rutland Water (19th).

RUTLAND WATER: There were 49 Egyptian Geese, five Shelducks, 123 Shovelers, 589 Gadwall, 2,355 Wigeon, 98 Pintails, 749 Teal, three Red-crested Pochards, 17 Pochards, 1,564 Tufted Ducks, three Scaup, two Common Scoters, 131 Goldeneyes, nine Goosanders, two Great Northern Divers, a Slavonian Grebe, 14 Great White Egrets, 12 Little Egrets, 1,410 Coots, 1,149 Lapwings, 600 Golden Plovers, eight Curlews, a Knot, three Green Sandpipers and 15 Redshanks.

Overflying Pinkfeet included 26 (11th), 130 (12th) and 80 (28th). Marsh Harriers and Peregrines were regular. Chiffchaffs were seen (16th and 30th). Seven Stonechats were at Egleton (10th).

OTHER SITES: Fort Henry Ponds included 151 Greylags, 45 Shovelers, 69 Gadwall, 58 Teal, 66 Tufted Ducks, 73 Wigeon, 151 Coots, Water Rails (6th and 26th) and a Cetti's Warbler (6th and 11th). Six Woodcocks were in Tunneley Wood (30th). Twenty-five Red Kites roosted in Exton Park (6th). A Marsh Harrier was at Banthorpe GP (15th). Little Owls and Tawny Owls were at Normanton.

Terry Mitcham

STAFFORDSHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: Belvide Reservoir had a Lesser Scaup (1st-30th), Caspian Gull (1st-25th), Black-necked Grebe, seven Yellow-legged Gulls (24th), a Ring-billed Gull/Lesser Black-backed Gull hybrid (24th-29th), and two Smew (24th). A Great Grey Shrike was at Sherbrook Valley, Cannock Chase (11th-26th). An American Wigeon was at Whitemoor Haye (17th-18th).

WARWICKSHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: Draycote Water had a Ferruginous Duck (1st-29th), with two (30th), a Scaup (8th-29th), one or two Red-breasted Mergansers (8th-13th), a Great Northern Diver (19th), Kittiwake (19th-20th), Glaucous Gull (29th), and two Swallows (26th). Napton Reservoir had a Ferruginous Duck (1st-29th) and Bearded Tit. Brandon Marsh had a Bittern (8th). Dosthill Lake had a Black-necked Grebe (29th).

A Red-crested Pochard was at Kingsbury Water Park (14th-16th). Ladywalk had a Russian White-fronted Goose (16th-30th) and Siberian Chiffchaff (28th). A Red-breasted Merganser was at Shustoke Reservoir (28th). Hawfinches were at Farnborough, Morton Bagot, Willey, Middleton Lakes and Wolston.

Common Scoter, Purton, Gloucestershire, 9 November

ANDREW JORDAN

WALES

Highlights

In association with

A second-winter male Pallid Harrier was at Dowrog Common, Pembrokeshire in the second half of the month. A late Red-rumped Swallow was a great find at Aber Ogwen NR, Caernarfon, on 30th.

ANGLESEY

HIGHLIGHTS: South Stack had a Yellow-browed Warbler (2nd), with two (3rd-4th), a Crossbill (3rd), Siberian Chiffchaff, Black Redstart, Fieldfare and five Whitefronts (4th), a Great Spotted Woodpecker and Woodcock (8th), three Hawfinches, a Yellowhammer, Brambling, Jack Snipe and Snipe (13th), and 36 Red-throated Divers, eight Great Northern Divers and a Little Gull (17th). Cemlyn had a Lapland Bunting (4th-7th), Merlin, Marsh Harrier, 19 Goldeneyes, 10 Purple Sandpipers and 30 Turnstones.

Cors Ddyga had 15 Whitefronts, six Pinkfeet, two Barnacle Geese, six Whooper Swans, a Mandarin, Great White Egret, 950 Lapwings, 526 Golden Plovers, three Ruff, a Jack Snipe, 80 Snipe, eight Black-tailed Godwits, five Water Pipits and a Ring Ouzel. Holyhead Breakwater CP had a Black Redstart (1st), three Yellow-browed Warblers (2nd), with singles (4th and 8th), eight Goldcrests, six Chiffchaffs, four Blackcaps, a Woodcock, and Swallow (8th).

The Alaw Estuary held 111 pale-bellied Brent Geese, a dark-bellied Brent Goose, 202 Wigeon, 50 Pintails, seven Little Grebes, five Cattle Egrets, a Green Sandpiper, 57 Grey Plovers, 147 Lapwings, 67 Knot, 48 Bar-tailed Godwits and nine Greenshanks. Holyhead Harbour had a Great Northern Diver, Red-throated Diver, Eider and three Black Guillemots. There were 45 Choughs at Llyn Traffwll.

Soldiers Point had last month's Snow Bunting (to 5th), a Yellow-browed Warbler (3rd-4th) and Garden Warbler (4th). The Inland Sea had three Whooper Swans, a Slavonian Grebe and two Scaup. Red Wharf Bay had two Long-tailed Ducks and three Snow Buntings. Three Firecrests were in Newborough Forest.

Ken Croft

CARMARTHENSHIRE

KIDWELLY QUAY: There was a Hen Harrier (3rd), Spotted Redshank (9th), and good counts of 300 Wigeon, 245 Teal, 214 Pintails and 42 Black-tailed Godwits (26th). Five Water Pipits were by Banc y Lord (17th).

WWT LLANELLI: There was a Yellow-browed Warbler (1st-7th), Garganey (9th-10th), a Merlin and two Water Pipits (9th), three Avocets (9th-10th and 15th), eight Spoonbills (10th) and a Marsh Harrier (14th and 16th).

OTHER SITES: A Snow Bunting was at Cefn Sidan throughout. Three Ring Ouzels were at Herbert's Quarry (2nd) and Garreg Lwyd (3rd). Another was at Llanllwni (16th), with a Black Redstart there (12th). Penrhyngwyn Lake had 47 Gadwall and two Goldeneyes (5th). A Brambling was at Ash Pits Lake (18th). A Ring-necked Duck was at Pencarreg Lake (22nd-24th). A Great Northern Diver was off Pembrey Harbour (24th). There were 56 Brent Geese by Llanelli Beach (26th). A Long-tailed Duck was at Power Station Pond, Burry Port (from 27th).

John Davis (johndaviswalesbirds@gmail.com)

White-rumped Sandpiper Newport, Pembrokeshire, 24 November

RICHARD STONIER

CEREDIGION

DYFI ESTUARY: Ynyslas had 70 Red-throated Divers (3rd), seven Brent Geese (5th) and 300 Golden Plovers (6th). Cors Fochno had a Hen Harrier (22nd). A Marsh Harrier was at Borth (25th). The River Clettwr had a Marsh Harrier (1st), Green Sandpiper (8th), and two Water Pipits plus a Hen Harrier (3rd and 8th). Ynys-hir logged two Avocets (17th-18th), five Water Pipits (18th) and a Brambling (28th). Glandyfi had three Common Sandpipers and a Green Sandpiper (21st).

LLANRHYSTUD-LLANON: A Black Redstart was at Llanrhystud Beach (9th). A Lapland Bunting was at Llanon (9th-10th). There were 250 Skylarks and 18 Rock Pipits (10th), and 1,100 Golden Plovers (11th).

NEW QUAY: There was a Great Northern Diver (24th), 53 Red-throated Divers (26th), and a Red-necked Grebe and Slavonian Grebe (26th-27th). A Velvet Scoter (10th) relocated to Aberaeron Harbour (11th).

OTHER SITES: Firecrests were at Talybont School (2nd) and Llanbadarn (22nd). There were 500 Fieldfares at Cwm Berwyn (3rd). Choughs were often inland around Llangwyryfon, including seven (4th). A Marsh Harrier was at Teifi Marshes (14th) and a Merlin at Aberaeron (21st). A Purple Sandpiper at Aberystwyth (16th) increased to seven (24th). A Hen Harrier was at Llyn Eiddwen (19th). Two Whooper Swans were at Llyn Rhosrhydd, Trisant (22nd).

John Davis (johndaviswalesbirds@gmail.com}

EAST GLAMORGAN

HIGHLIGHTS: Kenfig Pool had an American Wigeon (28th-29th) and Slavonian Grebe (21st-25th). A Ring-necked Duck was at Lisvane Reservoir (25th). A flock of 12 Whooper Swans off Sker was subsequently seen off Aberthaw (11th). Five more were at Flemingston Moor (15th). A Velvet Scoter and two Common Scoters were off Sully (from 18th). A Black-throated Diver flew past Sker (20th). A Caspian Gull twice roosted at Cardiff Bay. A Yellow-browed Warbler was at Hailey Park, Cardiff (3rd).

OTHER SITES: A Scaup was at Cardiff Bay, four Eiders off Sker, and a Red-breasted Merganser at Cosmeston. Kenfig had a Bittern, Great White Egret and Ring Ouzel. Mynydd Pwll-yr-Lwrch and Kenfig both had a Hen Harrier and Short-eared Owl. Llanilid also had a Hen Harrier. A Purple Sandpiper was found dead under electricity wires at Cilfynydd Common, well inland. Two Little Gulls were off Sker in stormy weather. A late Swift ranged between Cosmeston and the coast (30th).

Black Redstarts were at Southerndown, Aberthaw and Cardiff City Hall. Wandering Dartford Warblers were at Dunraven, Dyffryn Farm (Caerau), Nottage and near Cosmeston. Three Firecrests were at Bute Park. Lavernock had a good passage of 20 Hawfinches, with further reports from Heath Park, Forest Farm and Cosmeston.

Paul Roberts

GWENT

HIGHLIGHTS: Newport Wetlands had a Hoopoe (2nd), Yellow-browed Warbler, Great White Egret (9th), 1,500 Black-tailed Godwits (18th) and 19 Avocets (29th). A Dartford Warbler was near Blaenafon (16th-17th).

OTHER SITES: A Hawfinch was at Llangybi (9th). A Merlin was at Mynydd Llangatwg (14th). Two Yellow-legged Gulls were near Abergavenny (26th).

Chris Hatch

NORTH WEST

Highlights

In association with

A first-winter Penduline Tit was found at Woolston Eyes, Cheshire on 9th and was still present at least until 25th (others were in Cornwall, Bedfordrshire and Norfolk, this month).

CHESHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: Burton Mere Wetlands had a Green-winged Teal (3rd-10th) and 14 Cattle Egrets. A Green-winged Teal was at Sandbach Flashes (19th-30th). A Barred Warbler was in a Hoylake garden (6th-8th).

WOOLSTON EYES: A visible migration watch (2nd) included 1,390 Woodpigeons, 840 Fieldfares, 865 Redwings, 96 Chaffinches, a Golden Plover, 10 Whitefronts and a Hen Harrier. No1 bed ringing team had Chiffchaff, Long-tailed Tit, Sparrowhawk, Linnet, Lesser Redpoll, Redwing and Goldcrest. Sightings included a Merlin, Tawny Owl, Raven, Long-eared Owl, Stonechat, Woodcock, 335 Pinkfeet, 317 Fieldfares, 584 Redwings, 76 Chaffinches, a Marsh Harrier, Blackcap and Chiffchaff.

No 3 bed ringing team had Lesser Redpoll, Cetti's Warbler, Magpie, Blackcap, Redwing, Linnet, Fieldfare, Treecreeper and Great Tit. There was a Red-breasted Merganser and Yellow-browed Warbler. No 4 bed records included a Water Pipit, Scaup, Garganey, three Stonechats, four Goldeneyes, a Penduline Tit, Woodlark, two Hawfinches, a Willow Tit, seven Goldcrests, three Siskins, a Marsh Harrier and 135 Shovelers.

A count (16th) included 24 Mute Swans, eight Shelducks, eight Mandarins, 130 Shovelers, 103 Gadwall, a Wigeon, 183 Mallards, two Pintails, 422 Teal, 382 Tufted Ducks, four Goldeneyes, 40 Water Rails, two Golden Plovers, 22 Snipe, two Woodcocks, a Jack Snipe, two Green Sandpipers, three Great White Egrets and four Kingfishers.

Dave Steel

CUMBRIA

HIGHLIGHTS: An American Golden Plover was with Golden Plovers at Anthorn (1st). Green-winged Teal were at Millness (3rd-6th), Heversham (9th-29th), Ulpha Meadows (27th), and Arnside (25th), where there was also a Bittern (25th). A Great Grey Shrike was at Sunbiggin Tarn (6th-8th). A Todd's Canada Goose was at Whitrigg (22nd). A Common or Pallid Swift was at Motherby (5th).

GREATER MANCHESTER

HIGHLIGHTS: A Yellow-browed Warbler was seen (5th). A Slavonian Grebe was at Scotman's Flash (19th). A Hoopoe was east of Mottram in Longdendale (4th).

ELTON RESERVOIR: There was a Little Gull (2nd) and Scaup (5th-10th). A total of eight Hawfinches flew over in four small groups (3rd-9th).

PENNINGTON FLASH: There was a Ring Ouzel (20th), a total of 20 Whooper Swans, a

Common Scoter (1st-7th), Caspian Gull (3rd), Yellow-legged Gull (30th), a possible Siberian Chiffchaff (27th), seven Great White Egrets and a Bittern.

MERSEY VALLEY: A Great White Egret flew over Chorlton Ees, with a Dipper on Chorlton Brook (1st). Two Hawfinches were in Didsbury (5th).

OTHER SITES: A Hawfinch was at Lightshaw Hall Flash (9th). A Common Scoter was on High Rid Reservoir (24th). Audenshaw Reservoir had a Slavonian Grebe (1st), a Purple Sandpiper and Knot (5th), a Sanderling (9th), two Bar-tailed Godwits and a Grey Plover (10th), 10 Whooper Swans and a Caspian Gull. Horwich Moors had two Hen Harriers, a Merlin, 14 Hawfinches, two Ring Ouzels, five Whooper Swans and a Red-breasted Merganser. Manchester Mossland had 10 Greenland Whitefronts (3rd-19th), two Marsh Harriers and a Merlin. Up to three Caspian Gulls were in Gorton (8th-26th).
Dr Paul Brewster

LANCASHIRE AND NORTH MERSEYSIDE

EAST LANCASHIRE: Migration minima over Darwen included 9,800 Woodpigeons, 6,000 Redwings, Pinkfeet and Fieldfares, 1,900 Starlings, 100 Chaffinches, Jackdaws and Greylags, 70 Meadow Pipits, Redpolls, Goldfinches, Bramblings, Siskins Crossbills and Lapwings, 30 Goosanders, Reed Buntings, Linnets, Mistle Thrushes and Blackbirds, 15 Ravens, Cormorants, Skylarks, Snipe, Stonechats, Rooks, Teal, Stock Doves and Great Black-backed Gulls, and fewer than 10 Ring Ouzels, Mediterranean Gulls, Goldeneyes and Twite. A Red Kite was present (5th).
Mavis Smith

NORTH LANCASHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: A Barred Warbler was at Conder Pool (19th). A Richard's Pipit flew over Sunderland Point (10th). Black Redstarts were at Heysham Head (5th-6th) and Morecambe Battery (10th-11th). A Snow Bunting flew over Stoddav (3rd). Yellow-browed Warblers were at Leighton Moss (9th-12th) and Heysham (10th). A Siberian Chiffchaff was at Heysham Nature Park (5th).

HEYSHAM BIRD OBSERVATORY: Pale-bellied Brent Geese (from 6th) peaked at just 18. One or two dark-bellied Brent Geese were recorded intermittently with them (15th-24th). Five Common Scoters were off Heysham Head (24th-28th), with two Scaup off the Broadway area (17th). A melanistic Knot was recorded several times on Heysham Skeer. Ocean Edge had five Jack Snipe, and a late Wheatear (8th).

LEIGHTON MOSS: There was a Garganey (to 11th) and Spotted Redshank (2nd). A Water Pipit was seen twice. Nine Cattle Egrets were mainly in the Silverdale Moss area, with a Swallow in Silverdale village (5th).

LUNE ESTUARY AND NORTH FYLDE: A record 20 Cattle Egrets were in the Winmarleigh area early in the month. The Spoonbill remained near Cocker's Dyke (to 4th). Two Bewick's Swans were near Eagland Hill (24th) before moving to their traditional Moss Lane site. A Water Pipit was at Pilling Lane Ends (3rd). Twite peaked at just 15 at Knott End (16th). A late Swallow passed through Pilling Lane (18th). A Barnacle Goose was at Cockersands (28th).

OTHER SITES: A feral/escaped Red-breasted Goose was with Canada Geese near Arkholme (26th). Pine Lake had six Scaup (26th), and just three Pochards.
Pete Marsh

NORTH EAST

Highlights

In association with

The most exciting bird news for many, at least in the north of England, this month, was the discovery of a Scarlet Tanager (a yellow first-winter male) near Halifax, West Yorkshire for a few days. A probable juvenile Northern Harrier was at sites on the Lincolnshire coast, mid-month, while a Pallid Swift was over Donna Nook in the same county. Little Auks were plentiful on the North Sea coast.

NORTHUMBERLAND

HIGHLIGHTS: American Wigeon were at Milkhope on the Blagdon Estate (2nd-29th) and Shotton Pools (24th-26th). Druridge Pools had up to four Surf Scoters and up to 11 Velvet Scoters (3rd-30th), a Long-tailed Duck (4th-30th), Little Auks (6th and 21st), a Red-necked Grebe (14th-15th), and 150 Twite (6th-11th). A Lesser Grey Shrike was at Amble (5th). Colt Crag Reservoir had a Green-winged Teal (5th-21st), two Jack Snipe (18th) and a Great White Egret (21st). A Green-winged Teal was at Coanwood Ponds (18th).

EAST YORKSHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: Seven Lesser White-fronted Geese, of Swedish origin, came in off the sea at Flamborough (from 9th). A Green-winged Teal was at Tophill Low. A Dusky Warbler was at Bempton (6th).

FLAMBOROUGH: There were two Yellow-browed Warblers (2nd), a Lapland Bunting (3rd), Hawfinch (4th), Caspian Gull (12th), two Mediterranean Gulls (1st), a Pomarine Skua (4th), Cory's Shearwater (15th), a Black-throated Diver, 12 Great Northern Divers, a Grey Phalarope, Long-tailed Duck and 24 Little Auks (19th), 10 Velvet Scoters (22nd), a Black-necked Grebe (24th), two Black-throated Divers (25th) and a Water Pipit (from 26th).

HORNSEA MERE: There were two Great White Egrets (10th), a Slavonian Grebe (10th-13th), Black-necked Grebe (from 11th), Long-tailed Duck (25th), a Red-necked Grebe, Black-throated Diver and Great Northern Diver (4th), four Velvet Scoters (5th), and an Iceland Gull, three Grey Phalaropes and 17 Little Auks (20th).

SPURN AREA: A Bittern came in off the sea (1st). Five Ruddy Shelducks were at Kilnsea Wetlands (5th) when two Great White Egrets flew south. Over 1,000 dark-bellied Brent Geese at Easington Straight were joined by a Black Brant (13th). Seawatching mid-month produced five Great Northern Divers, three Velvet Scoters, a Long-tailed Duck, 15 Little Auks, three Red-necked Grebes, three Storm Petrels, two Leach's Petrels, a Black-throated Diver, Long-tailed Skua, Pomarine Skua, Grey Phalarope and a very late Cory's Shearwater.

Counts of common migrants included 19,000 Starlings, 1,200 Blackbirds, 527 Siskins, 25 Woodcocks, 23 Twite and near daily Hawfinches. Pallas's Warblers were in Easington (2nd) and at the Point (3rd). A Hume's Warbler was in Easington for a few days (from 3rd), with another Kew Villa (18th). Three Shore Larks were at Beacon Ponds throughout.

OTHER SITES: Yellow-browed Warblers were at Patrington (4th) and Tophill Low (5th). Hawfinches were at Paull Holme Strays (6th) and Keyingham (7th). Welwick Saltmarsh had 23 Twite (7th) and a Lapland Bunting (30th). A Great White Egret was at Bempton (9th), with two regular at North Cave Wetlands. Sixteen Snow Buntings were at Grimston (15th).

A Great Northern Diver was at Aldbrough (20th). Two Tundra Bean Geese (21st), a Smew (28th) and a Black-necked Grebe were at Tophill Low. A Little Auk was off Fraisthorpe (22nd). Four Caspian Gulls were at Southfield Reservoir (25th). A Red-necked Grebe was at High Eske (30th).
Ian Marshall (01482 627 446) and John Hewitt (07952 293 060)

Pallas' Leaf Warbler, Donna Nook, Lincolnshire, 4 November

GRAHAM CATLEY

WEST YORKSHIRE

BRADFORD: Undoubted highlight was a Scarlet Tanager in a Shelf garden (10th-13th), with a Hawfinch there (12th). There were 14 Whooper Swans over Oxenhope (1st) and five over Queensbury (9th). A Green Sandpiper was at Ben Rhydding (2nd). Ogden had a Shoveler and Mediterranean Gull (2nd), and four Ring-necked Parakeets (6th). A Pintail was at Redcar Tarn (8th). A mixed flock of Crossbills and Bramblings was at Stainburn Forest (9th). Soil Hill had a Jack Snipe (9th) and four Grey Partridges (19th). A Water Rail was at the Keighley Reserve (17th). A Great White Egret was at Harold Park and Low Moor late in the month.

LOWER AIRE VALLEY: Up to nine Whooper Swans were seen on six days. Pinkfeet peaked at 180 (4th). Six Common Scoters were on the Main Lake (2nd), with another (from 10th). Pintails increased to 22 (20th). A Mandarin was at Woodlesford (21st). A Slavonian Grebe was on the Main Lake (24th), with presumably the same bird on the Balance Reservoir (27th). Cormorants peaked at a record 125. There were three Great White Egrets. A Cattle Egret flew over (17th). A Marsh Tit was at Lemonroyd (27th).

A Spoonbill on four dates was the first November record, as was an Avocet at the Main Lake (5th). There was a Knot (10th-14th). A Green Sandpiper was at Skelton Lake on three days. A Caspian Gull was on the Main Spit (10th and 18th). One or two Water Pipits were on the Eastern Reedbed or at Lemonroyd. Three Bramblings flew over (4th), with another (9th). A Snow Bunting (4th) was the first for three years. Hawfinches over the hillside (5th) and at Swillington Park (14th) were just the eighth and ninth records.
Chris King (Bradford OG) and Paul Morris

SCOTLAND

Highlights

In association with

Highlights from Scotland during November included Eyebrowed Thrush and Brown Booby at (and off) North Ronaldsay, Orkney, an American Coot at Loch of Spiggie, Shetland, and plentiful shearwaters, including outstanding numbers of Great Shearwaters off the Northern Isles and Western Isles.

CENTRAL REGION

HIGHLIGHTS: Great White Egrets were at Gartmorn Dam (1st-23rd) and Loch Dochart (5th-20th). White-tailed Eagles were at Crianlarich and Brig o' Turk (9th). A Hawfinch was in North Broomage, Larbert (11th). A pale-bellied Brent Goose was at Blackness (15th and 17th). A Mediterranean Gull was at Skinflats Pools (24th). A Little Auk was off Bo'ness on the Firth of Forth (24th).

Short-toed Lark, Spiggie, Shetland, November

HUGH HARROP

CLACKMANNANSHIRE: Blackdevon Wetlands had two Shovelers and 55 Snipe (2nd), and a Little Egret (13th). A Marsh Harrier was at Tullibody Bridge (10th). A Merlin flew over Dollar Castle (15th). Gartmorn Dam had a Scaup (3rd-17th) and 51 Goosanders (17th).

FALKIRK DISTRICT: Taiga Bean Geese peaked at 117 on the Slamannan plateau. A Merlin was at Skinflats (9th). Two Little Egrets, 13 Grey Partridges, 14 Rock Pipits and 40 Twite were at Powfoulis (15th), when a Little Egret, five Twite and six Rock Pipits were at Higgin's Neuk. Blackness had eight Scaup (3rd), seven Red-throated Divers and two Turnstones (9th), and a Common Scoter (17th).

Kinneil had six Greenshanks (4th), a Long-tailed Duck (12th), 23 Great Crested Grebes (14th), two Little Egrets and a Turnstone (17th), six Scaup (28th) and a Spotted Redshank. Skinflats produced a Grey Plover, 350 Golden Plovers and a Marsh Harrier (2nd), 24 Whooper Swans, 100 Pintails and two Rock Pipits (15th), seven Pochards (20th), and eight Shovelers (24th).

STIRLING DISTRICT: A Jack Snipe was at Loch Watston (6th). Hen Harriers were around the Upper Keltie Water and Flanders Moss (10th). A Snow Bunting was on Ben Ledi (11th). Loch Dochart held 44 Whooper Swans and, unusual so far inland, a Black-tailed Godwit (14th). A Little Egret and Green Sandpiper flew over Craigforth (16th). A Little Egret was between the Teith and Allan confluences (17th). Two Ptarmigan were on Stob a Choin (16th). A Little Egret was by Cromlix Bridge (17th), when a Jack Snipe was at Ashfield Pool, and a Goshawk at Buckieburn Reservoir. A Hen Harrier was at Flanders Moss (18th).

UPPER FORTH ESTUARY: A co-ordinated count (17th) produced eight Great Crested Grebes, 15 Cormorants, 27 Herons, 379 Shelducks, 184 Wigeon, 802 Teal, 102 Pintails, a Long-tailed Duck, 26 Red-breasted Mergansers, 322 Oystercatchers, 177 Golden Plovers, 409 Lapwings, six Knot, 1,241 Dunlin, 334 Black-tailed Godwits, 325 Bar-tailed Godwits, 189 Curlews, 1,468 Redshanks and four Greenshanks.
Neil Bielby

LOTHIAN

HIGHLIGHTS: The White-winged Scoter (3rd-14th) and Stejneger's Scoter (4th) were in Gosford Bay. Caspian Gulls were at Eastfield (3rd), Dunbar (6th) and Scoughall (9th). A Ring-necked Duck was at North Couston Quarry (22nd-30th). A Grey Phalarope was at the Eskmouth, Musselburgh (23rd). A White-rumped Sandpiper was at White Sands Bay (29th-30th).

ABERLADY: There was a Water Rail (11th), Black-throated Diver (18th) and three Great White Egrets (30th). Gullane Point had a Great Northern Diver (18th), Red-necked Grebe (28th), 138 Little Auks (18th), a Great White Egret (24th) and four Lapland Buntings (26th).Seventeen Twite were at Craigielaw Point (3rd).

BARNS NESS: There was a Black Redstart. Two Brent Geese and a Yellow-browed Warbler were near Skateraw (2nd), plus a Tundra Bean Goose (21st). One hundred Little Auks flew past Torness (20th). Water Pipits were at Barns Ness (19th-21st) and White Sands Bay (24th-28th).

EDINBURGH: A Black Redstart was at Leith Walk (8th). Cramond held a Ring-necked Parakeet (14th) and Hooded Crow (15th). A Hawfinch flew over Burdiehouse, with 20 Waxwings at Stenhouse (26th).

GOSFORD BAY: There were six Red-necked Grebes, five Great Northern Divers, 90 Little Gulls and a Black Guillemot (3rd), four Surf Scoters (14th) and three Mediterranean Gulls (26th). Twenty Little Auks passed Ferny Ness (19th). A Mandarin was on Gosford Ponds (26th).

MUSSELBURGH: There was a Ruff (2nd), three Black-tailed Godwits (4th), a Spotted Redshank (8th), Jack Snipe (24th and 29th), 12 Shovelers (5th), a Red-necked Grebe (5th-17th), 40 Little Auks (18th), Snow Buntings (4th and 13th), a Merlin (18th), Short-eared Owl (26th) and 26 Twite (28th).

NORTH BERWICK: A Swallow was at Rhodes Holdings (5th). Scoughall had 22 Little Auks (16th), two Great Northern Divers and a Black-throated Diver (19th), and two Red-necked Grebes plus two Puffins (30th). Seacliff had a Mandarin and Snow Bunting (14th), plus 62 Little Auks (19th).

TYNINGHAME: A Red-necked Grebe and Snow Bunting were at Tyninghame Bay (5th). Seafield Pond held a Red-crested Pochard (16th), Shoveler, and three Mandarins (24th).

OTHER SITES: A Great White Egret was at Threipmuir/Bavelaw (4th-7th and 27th). Seven Snow Buntings (10th) and a Wheatear (11th) were in the Pentland Hills. A Hawfinch was at Roslin (4th). The White-fronted Goose remained near Temple (7th). A Ring-necked Parakeet was in Mid Calder (12th). Two Jack Snipe were at Clerkington (18th).
Jim Nicholson

OUTER HEBRIDES

HIGHLIGHTS: A Pallid Swift was at Tiumpan Head, Lewis (4th). An impressive movement of Great Shearwaters included 1,409 off Brevig, Barra (5th), and 738 off the Butt of Lewis (16th), with 260 there (17th). A Cory's Shearwater was off the Butt (8th). White-rumped Sandpipers included four at Loch Paible, North Uist (to 13th), one at Stinky Bay, Benbecula (6th), and two at Ardvule, South Uist (8th).

OTHER SITES: A Green-winged Teal was at Loch Stiapabhat (8th-27th). A Ring-necked Duck on Barra (1st) was joined by a second individual (7th-9th). Another was at Loch Tiumpan (8th and 29th). A White-billed Diver was at the Butt (9th). Some 520 Sooty Shearwater flew past Tiumpan Head (5th). A Marsh Harrier flew past Adabrock (16th). American Golden Plovers were on Barra (to 10th), and at Liniclate (6th and 26th). A Curlew Sandpiper was at Ardvule (11th).

Two Little Gulls were on Barra (2nd), with three at Tong (3rd), and singles at Coll (6th) and Loch Branahuie (11th). Five Little Auks passed the Butt (16th), with 11 there (17th). Turtle Doves were at Paiblesgarry (3rd) and on Barra (to 14th). A late Sand Martin was at Claddach Kirkibost (6th). A Black Redstart was at North Tolsta (17th). A Barred Warbler was in Carinish (3rd-14th).

An eastern-race Lesser Whitethroat was on Barra (to 10th). Yellow-browed Warblers were at Coll, South Glendale, and on Barra (two on 7th). A Red-breasted Flycatcher was on Barra (6th-7th). A Common Rosefinch was at Govig, Harris (2nd). A Lapland Bunting was on the Udal (3rd).
Steve Duffield (www.western-isles-wildlife.co.uk)

SHETLAND

HIGHLIGHTS: White-billed Divers were off Fetlar (3rd) and Sumburgh Head (10th). Normally very rare in Shetland waters, around 200 Great Shearwaters were recorded, the majority of records coming from Sumburgh Head (4th-18th). Spiggie had a Great Crested Grebe (to 7th), American Coot (26th-30th) and Short-toed Lark (3rd-10th). An American Wigeon was at Hillwell (1st-30th).

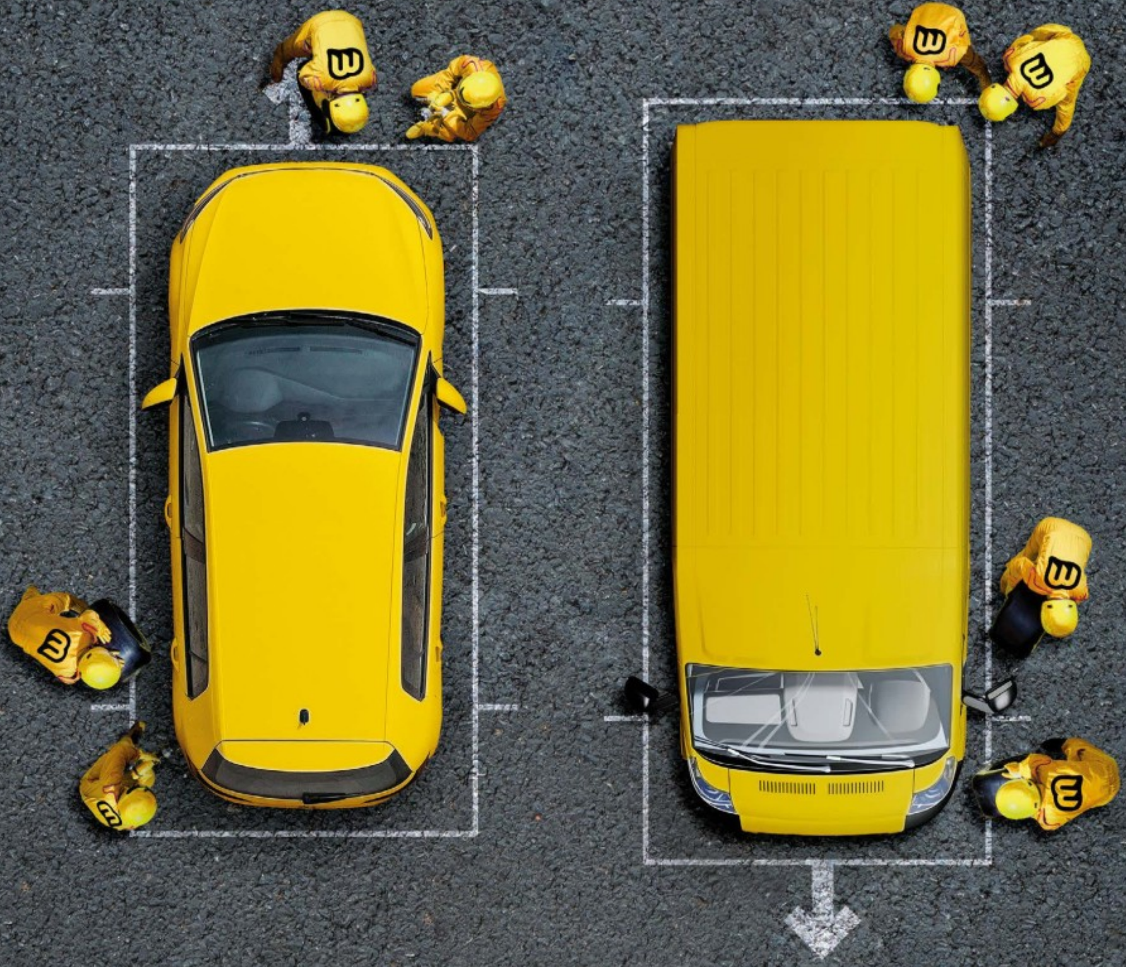
A Bufflehead was on Foula (17th-30th). Last month's White-winged Scoter was relocated off Linga (5th) Little Egrets were at Toft (3rd), Gutcher (5th), Out Skerries (6th-11th), Muckle Roe (7th), Unst (9th-30th) and Whalsay (14th-16th). A Rose-coloured Starling roamed Lerwick (1st-29th). A Firecrest was at Boddam (8th-10th). A Hornemann's Redpoll was on Whalsay (17th).
Hugh Harrop (www.shetlandwildlife.co.uk)

TAYSIDE

HIGHLIGHTS: Lunan Bay had a White-winged Scoter (1st-22nd) and Red-necked Grebe (17th). Montrose Basin had a Little Stint (2nd-9th) and Great White Egret (10th-14th). A Scaup was at Monikie CP (14th). Scurdie Ness had a Short-eared Owl (2nd), Little Auks (18th and 21st) and a Glaucous Gull (24th). An Osprey was at Forfar Loch (3rd). Mains of Usan had a Snow Bunting (5th) and Black Redstart (10th). Little Auks were at Fishtown of Usan (9th), Broughty Ferry (20th-23rd) and Arbroath (23rd). Hawfinches were at Dundee.

Rose-coloured Starling, Lerwick, Shetland, November

HUGH HARROP



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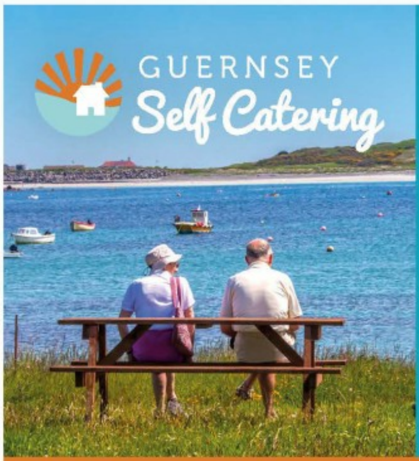

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Birding for a better future

A local climate change and biodiversity project rekindled **Seàn Culhane**'s passion for birdwatching…

A young Seàn birding on Ballybunion cliffs

SEÀN CULHANE

I'm almost sure what sparked my initial interest in birding. It all began in the early 1980s during one of the coldest winters I can remember. I was in my grandmother's kitchen in Ballybunion, County Kerry, watching the snow blanket the ground outside. The freezing weather had left the birds hungry and in need of help. My grandmother, feeling sorry for the Starlings gathered by the window, tossed bacon rinds onto the snowy garden.

What happened next captivated me. A massive flock of Starlings descended, filling the air with their chirps and squabbles. But it was their beautiful plumage that truly caught my eye – their feathers shimmering in the bright, clear light of the snow. The dark iridescent sheen of their feathers, tinged with flashes of purple and green, gleamed as they darted through the crisp air. I wanted to keep the spectacle going, so I ran around the kitchen, gathering any scraps I could find. Soon, other species joined the feast: shy Redwings and Fieldfares, Rooks, Jackdaws, Chaffinches, and even Black-headed Gulls. One Starling had a ring on its leg, and I became obsessed with trying to read it, convinced it had flown in from Scandinavia. I made clumsy attempts to catch it, desperate to learn its story.

That winter, I filled pages of a notebook with entries about the birds I saw. When it was time to go back to school, I left strict instructions for my grandmother to keep feeding them, especially the ringed Starling. This experience ignited my passion for birding. Living in Ballybunion, surrounded by cliffs, shingle beaches, and an estuary rich with overwintering waders, I was hooked from that moment on.

Throughout my 20s, birding was a constant hobby. However, as life got busier, my focus shifted. I met my wife Katie, juggled work and study, built a house, and travelled often. Birding took a back seat, but it never really left me. Even without binoculars in hand, I found myself glancing skyward, identifying birds on the fly.

My wife noticed it, too. On walks or holidays, I'd often lag behind, fixated on a distant bird. It became a familiar scene – me lost in my own world, peering into the tree tops or a hedgerow, while she patiently waited, amused by my distraction. I realised then that true birders never really stop birding; the curiosity is always there, even if it's not at the forefront of their lives.

Earlier this year, I got involved with Brilliant Ballybunion, a local initiative engaging the community to protect biodiversity and explore sustainable practices. The project's energy reignited my interest in birding.

One of our upcoming projects focuses on supporting the local Ringed Plovers, ground-nesting birds under pressure from habitat loss and climate change. Being part of a conservation effort gave my birding a new purpose, helping me feel less overwhelmed by the environmental challenges we face.

Then, as if the birding gods had conspired to make sure I wouldn't leave the hobby again, I spotted a Woodchat Shrike in my front garden – a rarity in County Kerry, and only the second recorded sighting. It stayed for four days, drawing birders from all over the county to my doorstep. It was a thrilling experience and a reminder of the joy birding brings.

Since then, I haven't stopped birding. The hobby that began in my grandmother's snowy garden has come full circle, blending childhood wonder with a newfound sense of purpose in protecting the birds and habitats I love.

Seàn lives in Ballybunion, Co. Kerry, with wife Katie, and greyhounds Benny and Pixie. At 53, he works as a quality engineer for a local manufacturing company. Outside of work, he has a passion for photography and art, which pairs well with his love for birding.

Want to tell us how you reignited your passion for birding? Email us at birdwatching@bauermedia.co.uk and we'll tell you how.

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